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FROM THE WHANGANUI
WWI CENTENARY PROGRAMME



THE ARMISTICE

An armistice is an agreement between warring parties to cease fighting. History is full of armistices, but THE ARMISTICE is always taken to refer to the armistice signed on 11 November 1918 to end the fighting in World War I. The actual peace treaty would not be signed until June 1919.

In the spring of 1918, after four years of fighting, both the Allied and the German forces were low in morale. During the winter of 1917-18 little happened. In March 1918 the Germans began a Spring Offensive, intended to end the war. It consisted of five battles over a hundred days.

At first the Germans did well. Their numbers had been increased by the arrival of troops from the Eastern Front. Their speed of advance improved by a new style of attack in which storm troopers, carrying very little equipment, moved quickly through the enemy lines. This tactic was initially very successful but eventually caused a serious problem for the German command, as supplies of fuel, ammunition, food and fodder, could not be moved at a comparable speed.

It was at this time that the American troops arrived in France, bringing a much-needed injection of men, supplies and weaponry to the Allies. This was a great morale booster for the Allied troops. From this time onward the balance in the war changed and the Allies were able to take the initiative.

By June 1918 the Germans had failed to break through the Allied ranks and had their number of fighting men heavily depleted. In August 1918 the Allies began a counter offensive. They allowed the German attack to move into Allied territory, knowing the German supplies lines were stretched to their limit, and then the French mounted a massive attack. The Germans suffered huge losses. They were also very short of food and fuel for both humans and horses. The historian D T Zabecki claims that these two factors, hungry men and no fuel,

meant that on several occasions the Germans stopped advancing, or did not retaliate, simply because they had no supplies.

In October 1918 the German military command wrote to the Kaiser informing him that victory was not possible. Germany was also having problems at home. Food supplies in the country were running out. Sailors revolted at the naval port of Wilhelmshaven. This unrest spread throughout the country, and on 9 November 1918, a German Republic was proclaimed, followed by the announcement of the abdication of the Kaiser.



Armistice cartoon

Artist: unknown *Auckland Weekly News* 14 Nov 1918

On 8 November 1918 a delegation of politicians from Berlin was taken secretly to a private train carriage parked in a siding in the Forêt de Compiègne, 60 kilometres from Paris, to negotiate the terms of an armistice. This they thought to be less humiliating than a surrender. At Compiègne they were handed a list of the Allies terms for an armistice, and given 72 hours to respond. There were to be no negotiations. On Sunday 10 November 1918 the Republican cabinet in Berlin gave instructions for The Armistice to be signed.

The Armistice was signed between 5.12am and 5.20am on 11 November 1918. All military action was to cease at 11.00am, Paris time. Germany was to give up all its weaponry, arsenal, aeroplanes and submarines. All Prisoners of War were to be returned. Information about mines, traps and poisonous gas was to be provided. Certain areas were to be evacuated and the Germans had to accept culpability for the war. This last item was to cost them 22 billion pounds in reparation.

The Germans thought these conditions too harsh, the French too lenient. The 22 billion pounds was not paid in full till 2010.

ARMISTICE DAY IN WHANGANUI

After four years of hostilities, World War I finally ended at 11.00am on 11 November 1918, when an armistice was signed.

In Whanganui, notice of the signing came through at 9.15am on the following day and was communicated to large numbers of people waiting expectantly in the streets for confirmation. The fire bell tolled and hooters

sounded, telling everyone the good news. When the New Zealand flag ran up the flagpole at the Post Office, the business of jubilation began in earnest. All business and public services were suspended from that moment.

In the *Wanganui Herald* of Monday 12 November, the headline announced, “THE DAY ARMISTICE SIGNED” and again on Tuesday 13 November, “THE DAY WHANGANUI CELEBRATES”. “Peace, perfect peace came yesterday and Whanganui enthusiastically rose to celebrate it.”

The great feature of the celebration was a long procession headed by a returned soldier with a bulldog mascot, followed by a group of returned soldiers. Most Whanganui schools were represented by children, in tableaux, singing on the back of trucks.

There was a good muster of South African and Māori Veterans, boys from Wanganui Technical School and Red Cross volunteers. School cadets played in bugle and fife bands alongside the Queen Alexandra, Garrison, Salvation Army and Highland Pipe Bands. The procession wound through the streets to Cook’s Gardens, where a service of thanksgiving was held, with rejoicing and singing led by united church choirs.

“The strains of the glorious hymn *Old Hundredth* broke the stillness and the tune was taken up by the thousands that lined the slopes of the green”, reported the *Wanganui Herald*. Speeches were made by Service personnel, Members of Parliament and Clergy. Anticipation of the return of servicemen and women was highlighted in many ways. Those who would not return were also acknowledged by a minute’s silence as the audience rose as one to reflect and give thanks for their sacrifice. The event concluded with the singing of a verse of the National Anthem, “God Save the King”.

Other thanksgiving services were held in local churches and were well attended. “At night, rejoicing continued to a late hour with thousands gathering at various places,



Whanganui citizens celebrate the end of the war on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918

Photographer: unknown *Auckland Weekly News* 21 Nov 1918

such as the Soldiers' Club, with bands playing patriotic airs. A number of finely decorated illuminated motor-cars paraded the Avenue during the evening. The empty benzene tin proved itself to be a very handy instrument for demonstrative purposes, irrespective of whether it was used as a side drum, dragged behind a motor-car, or merely kicked up the street. It served its purpose any way, that is, for making noise." This was in the *Wanganui Chronicle* on 12 November, and again on 13 November, "In Wellington a large crowd gathered on Parliament Steps at 10.30am to listen to the Governor General ... read a telegraph from the King."

I desire to send a message of greetings and heartfelt gratitude to my overseas people whose wonderful efforts and sacrifice contributed greatly to secure the victory which is now won

The large crowd sang the National Anthem and dispersed quickly for celebrations elsewhere. The influenza pandemic, rife at that time in New Zealand, caused the Health Authorities to demand no public celebrations in Auckland; no outward sign of celebration was recorded there until much later on.

INFLUENZA IN WHANGANUI

The end of the most destructive war in world history to date merged into another global crisis, the spread of a pernicious strain of influenza that killed millions. A hundred years ago this year, New Zealand was hit by the virulent influenza virus that claimed the lives of about 8,600 citizens.

The introduction of the deadly pandemic was blamed on the Royal Mail liner, Niagara. Carrying 'flu-stricken voyagers, she docked in Auckland on 12 October 1918. A Health Department enquiry in 1919, however, concluded that although some passengers were unwell with the 'flu, it was an "ordinary influenza", not the savage kind sweeping the world. This left unanswered the question of how it entered New Zealand. Was it a mutation of "ordinary influenza"? Did another vessel land passengers infected with the destroyer 'flu?

From October to December 1918, New Zealand lost about half as many people to influenza as it had in the whole of World War I. Māori were disproportionately affected. No other event has ever killed so many New Zealanders in such a short time.

The town of Wanganui was not spared. The 'flu overwhelmed many; whole families were affected, leaving no-one to nurse their ill. Schools, businesses and services, such as deliveries, all but closed.

By early November an inhalation chamber had been opened in Maria Place, in a building on the site where the Museum now stands. People could have their throats sprayed with a disinfectant to prevent infection. The supposed benefits were not widely taken up because most citizens were too wary of congregating in crowds and catching the disease.

Wanganui Hospital was inundated with the sick and quickly became inadequate for the influx of very ill people. A temporary hospital was set up in the Stewart



Gonville Town Hall, site of a temporary hospital during the 1918 influenza crisis

Whanganui Regional Museum Collection ref B/GTH/1

Home in Plymouth Street, swiftly followed by the Alexander Hospital in Ingestre Street, the Druids' Hall in Harrison Place, the Gonville Town Hall in Tawa Street and the Native Hospital (as it was termed) in Wicksted Place, plus others. They were largely staffed by unpaid volunteers who cooked, cleaned and nursed the sick.

At the peak of the pandemic in November 1918, 270 affected patients were in Whanganui hospitals, most makeshift and temporary. About 250 more stricken people were being nursed at home. About 130 people died in the Whanganui region. Over half of them were Māori.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS – MĀORI AGAINST WAR

When war was declared, some Māori volunteered to go and fight, and a Native Contingent and Pioneer Battalion were formed in 1915 as part of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Māori Members of Parliament, Apirana Ngata and Maui Pomare, organised recruitment drives. Two prominent Māori, however, stood out as conscientious objectors. One was Rua Kēnana and the other was Princess Te Puea.

Rua Kēnana was a tohunga, prophet, healer, and spiritual and secular leader of about a thousand Tūhoe. He claimed to be the successor of Te Kooti, and at certain times, styled himself as the New Messiah and the Māori brother of Christ. At Maungapōhatu, he formed a self-sufficient community which he called the New Jerusalem. From his time with Te Kooti, Rua formed the belief that Māori possessed a separate nationality from Pākehā. His Messianic messages promised the return to Māori of their lands and mana.



Rua Kēnana, 1908

Photographer: James McDonald Public domain

His religious beliefs made him a pacifist and he insisted his people boycott military service, asserting it was immoral to fight for the Pākehā king, given the injustices dealt out to Māori under the British Crown. “I have 1,400 men here, and I am not going to let any of them enlist to go to war”. He also said that the Germans would win,

and when they came to New Zealand, he would be king. The authorities called this sedition and manipulated a case against him. In the High Court the jury found him not guilty of sedition, only of resisting arrest. He was, nevertheless, sentenced to two years’ hard labour.

Te Puea Herangi, known as Princess Te Puea, was the grand-daughter of the Māori King, Tāwhaio Te Wherowhero. Her uncle, the third Māori king, Mahuta Tāwhaio Pōtatau Te Wherowhero, groomed her for leadership. She was crucial in reviving the King Movement amongst the Tainui people. During WWI she opposed the conscription of Māori, especially of Waikato iwi, who were still extremely bitter about the confiscation of their land.



Princess Te Puea

Photographer: unknown Public domain

Princess Te Puea maintained that her grandfather had forbidden Waikato to take up arms again when he made his peace with the Crown in 1881. He said that there should be no “blood to flow from this time on”. Determined to uphold his wishes, she also maintained that Waikato had its own king and had no obligation to fight for a British king. She did, however, state that if their land was returned, Waikato might reconsider.

When Ngata and Pomare failed to persuade Waikato-Maniapoto to enlist voluntarily, the Minister of Defence extended conscription to Māori, but decided to apply it only to those living in Waikato and Maniapoto.

Princess Te Puea offered refuge to those resisting conscription at Te Paina pā. On 11 June 1918 the police arrived at the pā, and seized 552 men who were taken to Narrow Neck camp near Auckland. Those who refused to wear military uniform, just like “the fourteen intractables”, were subjected to military punishment, or to two years hard labour in Mount Eden prison. By 1919 only 74 of the 552 men called up had enlisted. None of them went overseas.

THE CAPTURE OF LE QUESNOY

The New Zealand Division was involved in many battles on the Western Front but there were few notable victories. That changed when they captured the French town of Le Quesnoy, just one week before the war ended on 11 November 1918. This successful attack was New Zealand's last major engagement in World War I and is famous for the daring way in which it was carried out. It has special significance to New Zealand's military history.

Le Quesnoy was an old fortress town in north eastern France, and the Germans had occupied the town since August 1914 because of its strategic position. It stood on high ground, enclosed within two concentric systems of fortifications. The continuous 18 metre high ramparts and the moat posed a considerable challenge for the infantry. Also, because of the number of civilians in the town, bombardment was not considered an option.

The battle plan resembled that of medieval battles. The Royal Engineers Special Company would fire 300 flaming oil drums onto the ramparts and an artillery barrage would cover the infantry as it advanced to the town. Artillery would then open fire on the ramparts. The advance started early in the morning and there was little opposition as the New Zealand Division moved past the town and into the Forêt de Mormal.



Ramparts surrounding Le Quesnoy
Photographer: Ann McNamara, 2015

A prisoner was sent into the town to suggest a surrender, and later a formal request to the garrison commander was dropped by aeroplane. There was no response and so it was decided that the 4th Battalion would attempt to seize the outer ramparts from the west and the 2nd Battalion would advance towards the northern Valenciennes Gate.

At first they were repulsed by machine gun fire from the walls of the fortress, but by afternoon the 4th Battalion had reached the inner walls using ladders supplied by the

engineers. The height of the inner walls was problematic as the scaling ladders were not long enough. Lieutenant Colonel H E Barrowclough found a section where the riflemen could position a ladder on a narrow ledge atop a sluice gate and reach the grassy bank of the rampart. After an improvised assault by trench mortar, the scaling ladder was put in place.

Intelligence officer, Second Lieutenant L C Averill, scaled the ladder, service revolver in hand, followed by a small group of men from the 4th Battalion, 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade. Shots were fired at the fleeing Germans. Barrowclough and the rest of the Battalion scrambled up the ladder into the town and the garrison quickly surrendered. About 15 minutes later, the Valenciennes Gate was opened and the New Zealanders marched in, to the cheers of the townsfolk. Over 2,000 German troops were still in the town when it was captured and they were taken prisoner. The plan was successful in freeing the citizens of the town, but 135 men of the New Zealand Division died. Remarkably, no French citizens were killed.



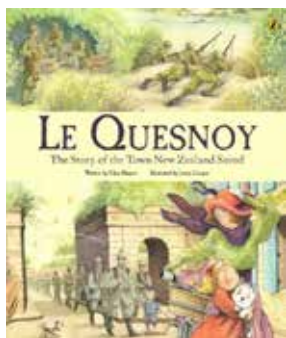
Avenue des Néo Zélandais
Photographer: Ann McNamara, 2015

The town still has a strong relationship with New Zealand and there are several streets and places with names associated with The New Zealand Division and features of New Zealand life. The primary school (L'École du Lieutenant Averill) and Rue d'Averill are named for Lieutenant Averill. The New Zealand flag flies on the corner of Avenue des Néo-Zélandais and Rue Nouvelle Zélande, and it flies alongside the French flag on ANZAC Day. There is a Rue Aotearoa and a Place des All Blacks. There is also a gate of honour leading to Avenue d'Honneur des Néo-Zélandais and a garden.

A delegation from the New Zealand Embassy in Paris visits the town every year on both ANZAC Day and Armistice Day. Lieutenant Averill's son has attended the ceremonies each year. The New Zealand Memorial Museum Trust is working to establish a permanent memorial museum in Le Quesnoy to honour all New Zealand soldiers who served in Europe in both wars. The locals still honour those who liberated their town and New Zealand visitors are sure to feel welcome when they visit.

A BOOK THAT RINGS TRUE

Renowned New Zealand war historian Glyn Harper has written a finely tuned story about the battle of Le Quesnoy for children. A complicated and dangerous situation existed for the people immured in their beautiful town in north east France, occupied for four years by the German Army. Harper examines the issues, the fears, the people and their deliverance by New Zealand soldiers.



Le Quesnoy – The story of the Town New Zealand Saved is told through the eyes of a little girl, clinging to both her mother and to hope. The small town still celebrates the liberation by the New Zealanders.

Beautifully illustrated by Jenny Cooper, I am betting that parents who have already read this book with their children loved it as much as their kids did. The book is a snip at around \$20. It is also available on loan from the Whanganui District Library.

PEACE AT LAST – AN ARMISTICE DAY CONCERT

The Arthur Wheeler Leedstown Trust, supporting the Whanganui RSA Welfare Trust Fund, sponsored an Armistice Concert, held in Whanganui on 29 September. Combined choirs from Rangitikei and Whanganui featured songs from World War I. Recitations about war and peace were read to a large audience in the Central Baptist Church.

The choirs were The Lyric Singers, the Whanganui Male Choir, Schola Sacra, Whanganui Community Choir, Arcadian Singers (Taihape) and the Rangitikei Anglican Parish Choir.

Colonel (rtd) Ray Seymour read from WWI diaries and the audience joined in enthusiastically with a medley of WWI songs that included *It's a Long way to Tipperary*, *Roses are Shining in Picardy*, *E Pari Ra*, *Pokarekare Ana* and *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. The audience observed a minute of silence for those who did not return. The concert ended with the singing of the National Anthem in Māori and English.

For information on all national activities commemorating the centennial of World War I, visit the official website www.ww100.govt.nz.

WHAT'S ON

ARMISTICE DAY COMMEMORATIONS

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage has detailed events being held around Aotearoa to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I.

See the MCS website at <https://ww100.govt.nz/armistice> for details of Armistice Day events around the New Zealand.

NATIONAL COMMEMORATION, WELLINGTON

- 100 gun salute on the Wellington waterfront, timed to end at 11.00am on 11 November 2018
- Service at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in Wellington, with a sunset ceremony, including a final daily Last Post by the New Zealand Defence Force from 10.30am on 11 November - live streamed

A Ministry message:

“The commemoration will remember the service and sacrifice of those who fought and those who kept the home fires burning. It will acknowledge the horrific loss suffered by the nation. It will also hope to recapture the jubilation and hopefulness that swept many parts of the world one hundred years ago.”

WHANGANUI COMMEMORATION

Armistice Day Service on Sunday 11 November 2018: assemble at the bottom of the Cenotaph Steps in Queens Park at 10.30am, service begins at 10.45am

OTHER COMMEMORATIONS

- National Army Museum at Waiouru at 11.00am on Sunday 11 November
- The Cenotaph in Palmerston North at 11.00am on Sunday 11 November
- Awapuni Function Centre in Palmerston North at 5.30pm on Friday 9 November
- Exhibition titled *Goodbye to all that - Armistice 1918* in the Alexander Turnbull Gallery, National Library, Wellington, until 1 December 2018
- Auckland RSA will hold an event in the Domain