

Recruitment and Service of Māori Soldiers in World War One

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On February 14, 1915, the First Māori Contingent sailed from New Zealand to Egypt to join the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) preparing for the attack on Gallipoli. The imperial government in London had reservations about whether Māoris could fight effectively as front line soldiers, so it was intended they only serve on garrison duty.¹ After six weeks at sea, they joined the review of Australian and New Zealand troops before General Ian Hamilton, the overall commander of the Gallipoli campaign. Although the new arrivals found the heat exhausting and the dust kicked up by marching men, cavalry, and rolling artillery meant they could hardly see further than ten yards, they impressed Hamilton as a “fine body of men.”² Three days later, the contingent was visited by the commander of the NZEF, General Alexander Godley, who was so pleased with their “real Māori welcome with hakas, songs, and a speech” that he arranged for them to be inspected by senior officers and dignitaries, including General John Maxwell, in command of British forces in Egypt, and General William Birdwood, commander of the Australian and New Zealand troops. Two days later on April 3, Rikihana Carkeek, a Māori private, recorded in his diary that the “boys gave a haka and welcome in the usual Māori custom” followed by an “impressive speech” by the medical officer of the contingent, Peter Buck (Te Rangihīroa).³ Standing with his fellow Māoris, Buck seized a very public moment to urge the generals “to allow the Māoris to go into the ‘firing line’ as it meant disgrace for a fighting race to do mere garrison duty.”⁴ He continued that “No division can truly be called a New Zealand Division unless it numbers Māori amongst its ranks,” and that although Māori were “only a handful, the remnant of the remnant of a people, yet we consider that we are the old New Zealanders.” At the end of his speech, he challenged his audience to “Give us a chance.”⁵

By highlighting their military ability, Buck made clear he wanted the restrictive and emasculating policy of limiting Māoris to garrison duty changed. But he was arguing for much more than the recognition of Māori as a fighting race. If the presence of the Māori contingent in Egypt gave authenticity to the NZEF because they were the “old New Zealanders,” then by inference Māoris were intrinsic to any understanding of national identity. In 1914, with a few prominent exceptions, Māoris were economically and socially marginalised. To improve these conditions Māori

leaders encouraged the enlistment of men in sufficient numbers to form a separate Māori contingent. They believed that a military unit that was specifically Māori would increase the visibility of Māori support for the war, and hopefully result in recognition that they should be treated as full citizens of New Zealand.⁶

Throughout the war, debates and tensions resonated in New Zealand concerning the recruitment of Māori and their enlistment in a separate Māori unit. This article argues that these concerns were shaped by different understandings of nationhood and identity. Māori who opposed recruitment did not identify with a national responsibility to support the British Empire in a time of war. The soldiers listening to Buck in Egypt heard him articulate the opposing view that it was “feelings of loyalty toward the Empire that had prompted the Māori” to serve. Like Buck, Māori leaders who supported Māori enlistment believed it would improve the lives of their people. Determined to use the war to achieve political purposes, they used gendered language infused with racial pride in the natural ability of Māori men as warriors. This way of understanding the identity of Māori men was visually reinforced by the performance of the haka (a traditional Māori dance) at home before departure and at the front. Throughout the war, this martial discourse echoed in the press and in public debates, and was often expressed by Māori soldiers themselves.⁷ In tension with the question of citizenship, a number of other specific concerns around Māori enlistment touched on identity. Would men from different *iwi* (descent from a common ancestor or tribe) form a cohesive unit that would be an effective military force? Who should be the officers? Māoris served in several theatres of war and spent their convalescence and leave in Britain. How were Māoris viewed as soldiers by other troops and by the British in general, and what did their experiences overseas mean to them? After fighting as front-line troops at Gallipoli, did the move to enlist all Māoris in a military pioneer labour unit undermine Māori feelings of masculinity and pride? And finally, who was a Māori?

Māori Reaction to the Declaration of War

Historians have long recognised that, for a small country with a population of just over a million people, New Zealand’s contribution to the war effort was substantial. Over 100,000 men served overseas, close to 17,000 were killed, and more than 40,000 wounded.⁸ Although the story of Māori recruitment, service, and resistance to enlistment has begun to be told, it is still not part of the mainstream narrative about New Zealanders during the war.⁹ This is perhaps not surprising, as until recently scholarship on the war has marginalised the contributions of all but white imperial troops, and still very little known is about the experiences of those men who provided essential service as labourers in theatres of the war such as the Western Front and Mesopotamia. Furthermore, most scholarship written on Māori soldiers during the war relies heavily on a limited literature, especially *The Māoris in the Great War*, written by James Cowan and published by the Māori Regimental Committee in 1926 and *Te Hokowhitu A Tu: The Maori Pioneer Battalion In The First World War* by Christopher Pugsley. In 2011, Timothy Winegard published *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War*, which adds to the scholarship on Māori soldiers in a comparative study of indigenous soldiers from the British Empire. While the earlier historiography remains relevant, the

recruitment and actions of Māoris during the war both as infantry troops and as pioneers was commented on extensively in New Zealand newspapers, and to a more limited extent in the British press. This article uses newspaper sources, oral testimony and soldiers' letters and diaries to explore how different understandings of identity were mobilised in the recruitment and service of Māori men.

As a dominion in the British Empire, New Zealand was immediately at war with Germany when Britain declared war on August 4, 1914. The response of New Zealanders was largely very supportive of their involvement, so there was little public dissent and no debate in Parliament.¹⁰ While there was a range of reasons for this response, importantly many people in New Zealand still identified themselves as British and thought of Britain as home.¹¹ While this way of identifying helped underpin support for the war, these feelings were in tension with a desire for fuller recognition of New Zealand's role in the empire. In 1907, the colony of New Zealand had become a dominion, a shift that had made little difference in forms of government, but that had raised issues of sovereignty and national identity. Furthermore, underlying the patriotic response was a widespread concern that the economy of New Zealand would suffer because of its dependence on Britain as a market for agricultural products, especially wool.¹² The immediate response of men volunteering for the army was augmented by a positive response to the government's request that everyone support the expeditionary force. Horses, motorcars, bicycles, financial contributions, and sundry gifts for the men's comfort—including tobacco, cards, and food—were donated.¹³ The speedy call-up was made easier because of the Defence Act of 1909, which had introduced compulsory military training for all men from 14 to 21 years of age. This meant that most men had received military training and that a system was in place to organise and further train them. A small number of Māoris, especially those who were literate in English, had also received military training. Most Māoris lived in rural areas, had limited English language skills, and were largely excused from complying with the Defence Act.¹⁴ The overall commander of the NZEF was General Godley, a professional soldier from Britain with family ties to New Zealand. In 1910, he had been appointed to organise compulsory military training and build the Territorial Force.¹⁵ On October 16, 1914, the expeditionary force sailed for Egypt, in convoy with British and Japanese warships.

When the call-up began, there was also an immediate response from Māoris who wished to volunteer, especially from communities or *iwi* in the east and north of North Island, notably Te Awara, Ngāti Porou, and Ngāpuhi.¹⁶ From the moment war was declared, Māoris expressed their support, using language imbued with patriotism, duty, and loyalty to Britain and to the empire.¹⁷ Peter Tahitahi who enlisted in 1915 in the first Māori contingent remembered that he had joined up "to answer the call from the king and the British army."¹⁸ Other men enlisted because brothers and friends were going or because they wished to see the world beyond New Zealand. Tahitahi signed up with one of his brothers in the first contingent, while two other brothers came later to "meet us in the battlefield."¹⁹ Some people also joined out of sympathy for and a feeling of identification with Belgium, a small country overrun by a much stronger one.²⁰ Māori communities also responded to the call for support of the expeditionary force by sending food, horses, and financial contributions.²¹ While most *iwi* were supportive, others were less willing to permit their young men to fight overseas in a war for the British. While this attitude was depen-

dant on a number of factors, the most important was the specific history of interaction with the colonial authority and white settlers, and unresolved issues over loss of land during the nineteenth century. Te Awara from the Bay of Plenty and Rotorua, who immediately offered three hundred men, had fought with the crown in the Waikato War against other iwi.²² The resistance to enlistment among the Waikato and Taranaki was in large part because of unresolved issues over the loss of land, which had been confiscated by the colonial authority in the same conflict.

Despite the enthusiasm from many iwi, there was confusion about whether the Māori offer to help could be accepted. For the imperial government in London, the question revolved around a reluctance to employ “coloured troops in the European war.”²³ Regardless, the New Zealand government did not prevent Māori men from enlisting in the expeditionary force, and an unknown number sailed for Egypt in October. It is likely that Māori men who enlisted at this stage had already had some military training under the Defence Act. Since they would have trained with Pākehā men, or New Zealanders with a European heritage, enlisting in regular units of the NZEF would not have raised concerns for them in terms of acceptance or language. In September, New Zealand’s Prime Minister William Massey informed parliament that a Māori unit was now possible, as the imperial government had decided to send Indians in the Anglo-Indian Army to Egypt, and that since Māoris were free citizens they should “be allowed to share in British citizenship.”²⁴ Massey decided to turn the organisation of a Māori contingent over to Minister of Defence James Allen and a Māori recruitment committee comprising four Māori members of parliament. These were Maui Pomare, who represented the western Māori electorate and was appointed the chair; Apirana Ngata, who represented the eastern Māori; Peter Buck, who represented the northern Māori; and Taare Parata, who represented the South Island. These men had excelled socially and politically in the Pākehā system, and they believed that acceptance for Māori people depended on adjusting to the majority Pākehā world. They were all highly educated: both Buck and Pomare were medical doctors who prior to the war had worked on public health issues in Māori communities to reduce the death rate from infectious diseases. In many ways they were “bridge people,” leaders who sought to ameliorate the consequences of the colonisation process. However, their success in the Pākehā world did not lead to their acceptance as leaders by all Māori.²⁵ The initial agreement was to send two hundred men, which was then raised to five hundred because of the overwhelming response to the recruitment drive. Men needed to be between twenty-one and forty years of age, and they would be paid the same rate as Pākehā soldiers.²⁶

The Māori Committee wanted to ensure that the contingent was as representative as possible of all iwi, so Māori were recruited from different regions across the country.²⁷ Quotas were therefore put into place, with each committee member organising his own district. The west and east coast each would contribute one hundred and eighty men, the north coast one hundred men, and the South Island, which was much less populated would contribute forty men, allowing “every tribe and all parts of the Dominion” to be represented.²⁸ Although the expeditionary force had not yet sailed, it was decided that those Māoris who had joined it would be permitted to remain with their units.²⁹ Pomare declared that in hundreds of letters he had been assured that Māoris “recognise that the British cause is their cause, the British king is their king, and that the God of the British is the God of the Māoris,

too. In this they are absolutely one.”³⁰ While the news that the Māoris would serve was generally greeted positively in New Zealand, the discussion of their potential as soldiers was shaped by a martial discourse: “the warlike enthusiasm and fighting power of the Māoris are the equals of any white race.”³¹ This language of racial pride and fighting prowess continued throughout the war.

Māoris threw “themselves heart and soul” into what was officially called the Native Expeditionary Force, but that quickly came to be called the First Māori Contingent.³² The contingent was organised and trained at Narrow Neck Training Camp, on the Avondale Race Course to the west of Auckland. While Ngata acknowledged that Māoris wanted to serve “shoulder to shoulder with fellow New Zealanders,” he was concerned that few Māoris had military training.³³ Carkeek described the recruits in the contingent as “the essence of the raw recruit, but willing to learn the modern arts of war as quickly as possible.”³⁴ The question of who the officers should be was quickly addressed. After General Godley raised concern that the army avoid becoming “mixed up in their tribal jealousies,” the Māori Committee was authorised to name all officers, except for senior officers, who would need to be European.³⁵ Buck, who was thirty-seven, enlisted in the contingent as the medical officer, and Captain Peacock, a Pākehā officer, was put in charge of the training. On October 20, Pomare visited the camp, declared himself very satisfied with the training, and expressed his confidence that Māoris, who came of “fighting stock,” would soon adapt and become excellent soldiers. He also noted approvingly that the contingent was representative of most of the leading iwi.³⁶

The choice of Avondale as a training camp alarmed some local authorities, who feared that the Māoris would spread infection—specifically typhoid fever—to nearby Auckland. Newspapers quoted the local health officer, Dr. Makgill, who claimed it was “extremely dangerous to collect a couple of hundred natives in one camp, or in one ship,” because the “habits of the Māoris” made disease prevention very difficult.³⁷ The military authorities dealt with this concern by inoculating recruits and refusing any man who had previously been ill with typhoid fever, to eliminate carriers.³⁸ Before departure, five soldiers were diagnosed with typhoid fever, one of whom died.³⁹ Members of the committee realised that the perception of Māoris as a contaminating influence hindered their acceptance as equal citizens, and they hoped that service as soldiers would help to undermine this belief. News reports stating that the “fighting Māori is to have his chance of active service on behalf of the empire of which he is a loyal subject and a free citizen” would have reassured them that Māori enlistment was being acknowledged.⁴⁰ Concern about Māoris contaminating other soldiers was not an issue once they went overseas, possibly because the conditions for all soldiers in the trenches were appalling.

In addition to initial doubts about whether the Māoris would be efficient and disciplined front-line troops, it was unclear where they would be deployed. At first, it was proposed to send half the contingent to Egypt and half to Samoa, although this raised concerns about how Samoans would respond to a Māori military force, and Māori leaders did not want the force split.⁴¹ In November, Allen announced that the imperial government had agreed that the entire contingent would go to Egypt, because Māori leaders would “rather they went to the front, and took real burdens on their shoulders.”⁴² Another concern for the Māori Committee was whether mixing men from different iwi in companies or tents would lead to tensions. The com-

mittee was divided on how best to proceed. Pomare felt mixing up the men would be more effective. However, Ngata and Buck felt that if possible men from specific regions should be kept together, especially as their elders had urged their young men to uphold the name of their specific people.⁴³ It was decided that this was the best solution for group cohesion, so B Company contained men from Rotorua and the East Coast, and A Company contained men from the rest of the country, including the South Island.⁴⁴ In readiness for departure, the contingent sailed to Wellington, and then paraded through the city alongside the Third Reinforcements for the expeditionary force. The local news described them as “sons of a warrior race, fine, upstanding, athletic men,” and that it was “something to see them paraded side by side with their white New Zealand comrades.”⁴⁵

Service at Gallipoli and on the Western Front

The First Māori Contingent sailed from Wellington on February 14, 1915, with the question of front-line duty still unresolved, which led to Buck’s passionate and articulate appeal to be considered a fighting force described at the beginning of this article. While in Egypt, the Māori “earned golden opinions by their smartness and bearing and general efficiency,” but despite this, when the Gallipoli campaign began they were deployed on garrison duty to Malta.⁴⁶ However, by July the heavy losses of the New Zealand and Australian forces on the peninsula led to their deployment, and attached to the New Zealand Mounted Rifles the Māoris took part in the August attacks on Chunuk Bair. The contingent was led at Gallipoli by Major A. H. Herbert from the Third Reinforcements, who had replaced Captain Peacock after he became ill on the voyage and had to leave the ship shortly after disembarking.⁴⁷

Buck recorded in his journal that the Māoris “had passed through the baptism of fire with courage and dash surpassed by none and had proved themselves worthy of their ancestry.”⁴⁸ In a letter published in a local newspaper at home, a soldier in the contingent who had lost his brother in the battle wrote that “all the colonial troops swear by our men and cannot say enough for them,” and that General Godley had praised the Māoris as the “finest soldiers who fought in the Gallipoli campaign.”⁴⁹ Other colonial soldiers praised them as excellent soldiers. In his diary, a Private Swan of the Wellington Infantry Regiment recorded in his diary “the Māoris had the honour of starting the ball and they made a brilliant success of it.”⁵⁰ The men themselves were proud of their conduct on the battlefield. In a letter to Balneavis, private secretary to Ngata, a soldier described his pride in the contingent, writing “our boys showed dash and initiative and won fame among our Pakaha boys.”⁵¹ Many articles and personal reminiscences about Gallipoli referenced how inspiring the *Ka Mate Ka Mate* haka was that echoed around the hills as the Māoris went into battle.⁵² Despite their small numbers, and although soldiers from around the empire fought at Gallipoli, including a substantial number of Indians, the service of the Māoris was also noted in Britain. Under the heading “A War Dance in the Trenches,” the *Times* described them as fierce and effective soldiers who had performed the haka before the battle.⁵³ When news of the Māori role in the campaign became known at home, the decision of the Māori Committee to use army service as a way to enhance Māori status at home seemed to have been a successful strategy.

Although Buck would later write of Gallipoli that it had forced recognition that “the Māori is a better man than they gave him credit for,” the campaign had left the Māori contingent with a serious problem—a shortage of men.⁵⁴ The newspapers described the Māoris after Gallipoli as “a mere handful,”⁵⁵ and a soldier who met the contingent on the Western Front remembered them as “chopped up terrible.”⁵⁶ The casualty rates were very high, and although reports vary, it appears that out of the original force of sixteen officers and four hundred and sixty-one men only two officers and perhaps one hundred and thirty-two men remained to be evacuated at the end of campaign.⁵⁷

Although the Māoris received praise for their fighting on the peninsula, Herbert their commanding officer, who did not speak Māori or understand their culture, asked after the August 1915 attacks that four Māori officers be replaced. Captain Pitt, the most senior, who had served in the South African War, was respected by his men, and seen by them as a fine leader in combat.⁵⁸ The other three officers were Captain Dansey, and Second Lieutenants Hiroti and Hetet. In 1914, on his application to be considered as an officer, Dansey had been described in a letter written by the Te Awara chiefs as well-educated, a fine athlete, and the “pride of the people of this district.”⁵⁹ Buck sent a letter to the Māori Committee asking them to do what they could to provide help for the returned officers.⁶⁰ Since the four officers had the support of their men, but not their commanding Pākehā officer, the problems may have originated in different leadership styles between the British Army and Māoris. For a Māori officer to earn the respect of his men it would have been necessary to distinguish himself in battle and to lead his men, regardless of different orders from a more senior officer. Regardless, Herbert asked for the four men to be relieved of duty. The news spread through the Māori community and had an adverse effect on recruiting.⁶¹ The committee made clear to Allen that no more Māori recruits would be forthcoming until they could be satisfied that no injustice had been done. They also requested that Herbert “should not have anything more to do with the Māoris.”⁶² Ultimately, three officers were returned to the unit in France and served with no further complaints against them, and Pitt was given a medical discharge.⁶³ In fact, Dansey ended the war a captain and was awarded the Military Cross.

Once his forces were all back in Egypt, General Godley needed to reorganise the New Zealand Division in preparation for deployment to the Western Front, and he decided to disband the Māori contingent as a separate Māori force. The men were unhappy about moving into other units and sent letters home saying “Kua wehewehē Matou” (We are separated).⁶⁴ The Māori Recruiting Committee immediately swung into action, making clear to Allen that they were very unhappy about the “merging of the Māori force at the front with the pakehas” and that they would not continue recruiting if a separate Māori unit ceased to exist.⁶⁵ Under pressure from Allen to meet the demands of the committee and because he needed a military labour unit, Godley compromised, and put the Māoris into the newly-formed New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, with reinforcements from the Otago Mounted Rifles.⁶⁶ While this meant that the Māoris would no longer be a front-line infantry force, Godley wrote to Allen saying it was the best solution, as the “Māoris will thus be kept together and utilised in work which should suit them,” remarks that highlight the prevailing stereotypes prevalent in New Zealand about Māoris as uneducated and best suited to employment as labourers.⁶⁷ Importantly, he also held out the hope

that if in the future there were enough enlistments they would all be posted to the Pioneer Battalion and that “eventually it will become practically entirely Māori.”⁶⁸ Since Herbert could no longer command the respect of his troops, Godley selected Major George King, who had been a staff captain in the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, to succeed him, and Buck, who agreed to move from the medical service, was promoted to major and second in command of the battalion.⁶⁹ Back in New Zealand, the Māori Recruiting Committee had mixed feelings about the decision. The men were to be kept together, but not in a fighting unit, and the battalion consisted of two white and two Māori companies.

The decision to make Buck the second-in-command of the pioneers was inspired, as he had the authority to provide a bridge between Pākehā and Māori worlds. Buck also had the confidence of the Māori Committee, and his support of organising Māoris into a military labour unit made the move more acceptable to the committee members. The change from front-line fighting also answered the growing concern of Māori elders, who felt that further high losses were a threat to the future of their people. This was a realistic fear, and the Māori Committee were always aware they were recruiting from a limited number of Māori men. In 1915, on the first recruiting poster, they expressed their “earnest hope that, though the Māori Race is among the smallest of those within the British Empire its name not be omitted from the roll of the peoples who are rallying to maintain the ‘mana’ of King George the Fifth.”⁷⁰ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Māoris were considered a dying race. Although this discourse continued into the twentieth century, the population was increasing before the war thanks to increased immunity to infectious diseases and public health initiatives. In 1901, the census returns recorded 43,143 Māoris. By 1914, they recorded 49,844 Māoris.⁷¹ However, the loss of too many young men in battle would have changed this trajectory. Regardless, the Māori Committee felt the potential benefit of Māori participation in the war was worth the consequences. Shortly after the pioneers arrived in France, Buck wrote a letter expressing his strong feelings on this issue to Thomas Mackenzie, High Commissioner for New Zealand. Excerpts from the letter were published in both British and New Zealand papers: “I feel proud that the Māoris have been able to do their share. I would sooner see every Māori die fighting according to their best traditions than live in inactivity in New Zealand.”⁷²

Since the Māori population was relatively small, it made meeting quotas over four years difficult. The first contingent had numbered five hundred and eighteen men, the second, which sailed in September 1915, was only three hundred and eleven men. The third contingent leaving February 6, 1916, consisted of three hundred and fourteen men, but only one hundred and eleven were Māori. In an attempt to fill the quotas, Pomare had recruited Pacific Islanders. There were about one hundred and forty-eight men from Niue and fifty-five from Rarotonga.⁷³ This had mixed success for a number of reasons, partly the lack of training, the climate on the Western Front, and language difficulties. Reinforced by the second and third contingents, the Pioneer Battalion left for service on the Western Front on April 7, 1916, and remained there for the duration of the war. Later that month, Pomare recruited in the northern districts—the area that Buck had represented in parliament—and he reported that the decision to keep the Māoris in their own unit had a positive effect on recruitment.⁷⁴ In 1916, Buck wrote a letter home to a friend that was pub-

lished in local newspapers, saying that the “boys did good work on the Somme” and “as long as you send us the men we know we can maintain the standard we set up.”⁷⁵ The Māori Recruiting Committee did its best to respond. By September 1917, the battalion had enough recruits to become a fully Māori unit, even though the committee had struggled to recruit men after the first contingent sailed.⁷⁶

On reaching France, the Pioneer Battalion helped prepare for the battle of the Somme by digging new trenches and roads, sandbagging parapets, and draining dugouts. The battalion was also credited with digging Turk Lane, one of the longest communication trenches on the Western Front.⁷⁷ The work was “hard and never ending,” especially in the hard chalk ground, and could be dangerous.⁷⁸ During the battle of the Somme on September 15, six Māori soldiers died and many others were wounded. Pioneers frequently worked on the front line; one soldier remembered that there were occasions when he had to lie down and put his “shovel up in front of my face because of bullets.”⁷⁹ Buck was proud of his men, and wrote home that “Under the most trying conditions, they are cheery and bright. They take an interest and pride in their work that robs labour of half its burden. Their health is good even in this climate. With regard to their conduct in the field I feel very proud of them.”⁸⁰ The pioneers were regularly praised for their work by other troops, and this was publicised at home: “The New Zealand soldiers who participated in the capture of Fleurs speak with enthusiasm of the magnificent work done by the Māori Pioneer Battalion,” so New Zealanders would have been well aware of the type of war service undertaken by the Māoris, and that they were deeply appreciated by other troops at the front.⁸¹

As reinforcements arrived to replace soldiers who were killed, wounded, or became ill, the question of the mixing of men from different iwi in the same sections no longer seems to have been a concern. William Bertrand, who enlisted in the pioneers in 1916, remembered that as a corporal he had twenty men under him who were not organised along iwi lines.⁸² In terms of officers, the members of the committee continued to insist that “preference should be given to members of the Native Race in officering the Māori troops.”⁸³ This sometimes led to misunderstandings with the defence department, who supported a system of promotion according to the ability demonstrated by men when recruited.⁸⁴ Eventually, the question of junior officers for the battalion was largely resolved after the Māori Committee requested that no more officers be appointed in New Zealand: rather, they should be promoted in France from the ranks.⁸⁵

Challenges to Māori Recruitment

As the war went on, the Māori Committee struggled to fill quotas for the pioneers, which by March 1916 were set at an unrealistic one hundred and fifty men each month.⁸⁶ Since the number of recruitments fell far short of quotas, Māoris were sent overseas at “irregular overseas intervals” with Pākehā reinforcements.⁸⁷ Reaching quotas was made harder because of the sustained refusal by some iwi to permit their young men to volunteer, most notably Waikato. In May 1915, a committee of elders in Waikato drew up a list of twenty points explaining why they believed their young men should not enlist. Their main argument was that “the people should not seek war in the regions of other folk but only practice it where you yourselves

stand.”⁸⁸ This resistance to enlistment highlights the ways that the debates around recruitment mobilised different aspects of Māori history and cultural beliefs. Those Māoris who supported fighting called upon cultural understandings of Tumatauenga, the god of war, to instil pride in military service. Conversely, the Waikato used the teachings of Tawhiao, the second Māori king, to argue against enlistment using his words “that this thing, War, must be banished.”⁸⁹ The Kīngitanga, or Māori King Movement, began in the mid-nineteenth century among certain iwi in North Island as a way to strengthen the Māori position in negotiation with the British crown. The Kīngitanga was not accepted by all iwi, but it was supported by a number of powerful iwi, including the Waikato. The king during the war was Te Rata Mahuta, who was the hereditary chief of the Waikato.

It was also difficult for the Māori Committee to find suitable recruiting agents, who needed to speak the language and understand the culture of specific iwi. It was felt that Māoris who were too old to enlist themselves were too “Māorified” to successfully recruit a younger generation of men, and younger Māoris were often “too Europeanised” to recruit in rural areas.⁹⁰ One agent wrote to Pomare complaining about the low esteem his work carried, and that unlike soldiers he had no “chance of promotion or military commendations.”⁹¹ By 1916, it was clear to the committee that the most effective recruiting agents were officers and NCOs who had served at the front. In July, 1916, the Māori Committee requested experienced officers be sent home from the front to help with recruitment and training, and then return to France with the new recruits. This was agreed, and in August Buck selected an officer and an NCO to return to New Zealand for a month.⁹² Māori soldiers who had been discharged because of injury were also effective recruiters.⁹³

To be a soldier demonstrated for many young men their pride in being Māori, but it raised another challenge for the committee—who was a Māori? The language of quarter, half, and three-quarter caste was used in official documents, on recruiting posters, in the newspapers, by the committee, and by the men themselves.⁹⁴ In a 1915 letter to Allen asking to be considered for a Māori contingent, Frederick Katene identified himself as “a three-quarter caste Māori.”⁹⁵ He was accepted and sailed as a private in the second contingent. Many men in the Māori regiment had a European parent or grandparent. Buck himself had an Irish father. Despite the efforts of the committee to ensure that as many men as possible with Māori heritage joined the pioneers, the men themselves usually decided where to enlist. Bertrand explained that although his two brothers had joined Pākehā units, he wished to serve in a Māori unit. Unlike his brothers, who had been “brought up Pakeha-style,” he felt like a Māori because of his upbringing and because he spoke the language.⁹⁶ So, for him being Māori was a self-identification with a number of clear markers that did not necessarily depend on close family relationships.

Since the beginning of the war, many Māoris had enlisted in regular units, and despite the best efforts of the committee they continued to do so. In November 1915, when twenty-nine soldiers were asked if they would like to transfer to the Māori contingent, twenty-five chose to remain with their present unit, where they obviously felt established.⁹⁷ The following month, Allen noted in a memorandum that, although the Māori Committee wanted all Māoris in Pākehā reinforcements to be transferred, he was only willing to invite them to transfer, as he “did not feel it was right to compel them to do so.”⁹⁸ From the committee’s point of view, the prob-

lem persisted. In 1917, Pomare wrote to Allen complaining that “Māori and half-castes are still permitted to enter European camps” and that this was “a leakage which our Māori Battalion should not have to face.”⁹⁹ Pomare’s solution was to request all Māori serving on the Western Front be forced to transfer to the one Māori unit. On hearing of the request, General Godley compromised and made moving a voluntary decision for each soldier. Of thirty-two Māori who were then given the choice, only eight chose to transfer.¹⁰⁰ There is no record of the reasons for their choice. We can surmise that there were many: reluctance to leave comrades in their present unit, hesitation about joining a labour battalion, and what pioneer service might imply about their military ability.

Although from 1916 the Māori Committee was recruiting men for military labour work and not as front-line troops, the martial discourse about Māoris as “fighting warriors” continued in the press. The committee also continued to use the same language, frequently evoking the warrior ethos of the ancestors. Using martial discourse reinforced certain Māori understandings of their own identity and history, and was useful to encourage young men to enlist. The haka was a striking visual enactment of the ideal of Māori men as “fighting warriors”: it evoked pride in their Māori identity, their masculinity, and their ability to excel as soldiers. Newspapers in New Zealand regularly showed images of soldiers performing the haka, helping sustain the concept of a martial people inherently skilled at fighting. The haka is a posture dance that takes a variety of forms and that can be performed for a number of reasons, including by men about to go into battle. The most famous war haka, or *peruperu*, *Ka Mate, Ka Mate* was a celebration of life over death.¹⁰¹ In 1919, a lengthy and detailed news article, published in New Zealand about the experiences of Māori soldiers in the war, led with the headline in large capitals: “*Ka Mate Ka Mate*.”¹⁰² Throughout the war, Māori soldiers performed the haka prior to embarking, for dignitaries visiting the troops behind the lines, and as entertainment in Britain. These events were reported in New Zealand and British newspapers, often with accompanying photos. The British high command found the haka was useful for morale behind the lines, not only for the Māoris, but also for other troops. However, the men could perform a haka spontaneously. In 1917, at the battle of Passchendaele, after a team of six horses had failed to move a gun through the mud, a party of twenty Māoris were observed doing a spontaneous haka before pulling the gun into place.¹⁰³ Not everyone who observed the haka was impressed. Herbert Hart, an officer in the NZEF, dryly remarked in his diary that the “Māoris go on to Malta; for more haka displays presumably.”¹⁰⁴

Performing the haka not only demonstrated courage and readiness for battle, but also good health—an attribute that at the time was not usually attributed to Māoris. In fact, a range of negative images about them was common in New Zealand before the war. Although attitudes varied, Māoris were often characterised as unhealthy, irresponsible, dirty, and stupid. An editorial at the beginning of the war highlights the difficulties the Māori Committee had in convincing the public, as well as military authorities, that they would make fine soldiers in the British Army. It described Māoris as “obstreperous, undisciplined and unclean...drunk and offensive to sight and smell,” and lamented that because of the proximity of Narrow Neck Training Camp to Auckland, life was “impossible for decent Pakahas.”¹⁰⁵ In the nineteenth century, the haka was seen as an indication of savagery.¹⁰⁶ However, during the war

it encouraged recruitment and reinforced more positive stereotypes by representing Māori men as healthy, disciplined, and fierce in the protection of their homeland—not contaminating the nation, but, rather, worthy citizens willing to die to save the nation.

By 1916, the New Zealand government realised that the volunteer system of recruitment for the NZEF was not providing enough men to replace the losses on the Western Front. In September 1916, the Military Service Act introduced conscription, which was initially imposed only on Pākehās. The act allowed very little room for conscientious objection, only permitting those who had declared prior to the war that military service was contrary to their religious belief. The act did not specifically mention Māori conscription, and members of the Māori Committee spoke out strongly for conscription to be applied to all eligible men. In a speech in parliament, Ngata stressed that “We could not maintain our self respect...that we Māoris should stay at home while the Pakehas went...it would be regarded as a reflection on a warrior race.”¹⁰⁷ Pomare further argued that “it is the fairest way. It treats every man alike, no matter what his wealth, no matter what his colour may be.”¹⁰⁸ Since the beginning of the war, the strategy of the Māori Committee had been dedicated to recruiting enough Māori men to sustain a visible Māori presence in the war. However, as the war continued, those iwi—especially Te Arawa and Ngāpuhi, whose young men had enlisted in large numbers—could no longer supply enough men to meet the quotas. The debate around conscription meant that the Waikato became the focus of a campaign to persuade or shame them into supporting the war.

There had been no volunteers from the Waikato in the First Māori Contingent, and in the following two years the chiefs had successfully prevented their young men from enlisting. This had been embarrassing for Pomare, who was the member of parliament for that electorate. Furthermore, the resistance of one of the largest iwi, which could have sent up to a thousand men to the war, added to the problem of meeting quotas. The conscription debate allowed Pomare to publicly demand “why should some tribes give their best under a voluntary system while others refuse to send their sons to the front?”¹⁰⁹ In November 1916, in an attempt to change the situation, Allen visited the Waikato to give a speech during a celebration of the anniversary of Te Rata’s coronation. Pomare and Ngata were in attendance to lend their support and to help with translation. An *Auckland Star* article about the event entitled “Māori Slackers” described the Waikato as “sullenly aloof,” and mocked them as “effeminate” buffoons who refused to live up to the spirit of their ancestors.¹¹⁰ In his speech, Allen extolled the service of those New Zealanders who had patriotically enlisted, and evoking Belgian atrocities, he urged his audience to imagine what would happen to their women and children if the Germans won the war.¹¹¹ The moderate reply from Tupu Taingakawa, a leading chief of the Waikato, outlined the grievances of the iwi dating back to 1861. He said he did not wish revenge, and ended by stating he stood by Te Rata’s words: “Let the young men go if they choose.”¹¹²

The meeting failed to change the situation and, after urging from the Māori Committee, on 16 June 1917, the government included Māoris in the provisions of the Military Service Act. This was later amended to only apply to the Waikato, as it

was argued other iwi had already fulfilled their obligations. In September, Pomare addressed a large gathering in his district to discuss the new regulations. He read out a message from Allen that sent his “kindly greetings to the Waikatos” and told them they had “one more chance” to “fall into line with their brother Māoris throughout New Zealand.”¹¹³ His appeal fell on deaf ears, and the Waikato continued to resist. They claimed exemption under the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, arguing that “we signed to make peace and they put a Bible in our hands. They have now taken the Bible away and put a sword into our hands and wish to make us fight.”¹¹⁴ The authorities turned down this appeal for exemption.¹¹⁵ In the summer of 1918, in a final attempt to persuade the Waikato to enlist, Pomare attended an open meeting where he was greeted with a haka where the performers stood naked, waist high in a river, and at appropriate times turned their posteriors towards their guest.¹¹⁶

In April 1918, the first call up cards ballots were applied in the Waikato, and those resisting the call up began to be arrested, including Te Rata Mahuta, the brother of the Māori king.¹¹⁷ Despite sustained attempts to compel the Waikato Māori to serve, including imprisonment, no conscripted Māori were sent overseas. The campaign to resist was one of passive resistance. Young men who refused to report for service when they were called up were arrested by the police and then carried to waiting vehicles.¹¹⁸ The Waikato were not the only resisters to conscription, which included socialists and Irishmen who also refused to serve, but as an organised cohesive group they were the most visible and the most successful. Out of four ballots, 552 Waikato men were called up, 74 agreed to go to the training camp, and 111 were put in prison.¹¹⁹ After the war, the government had to decide what to do with a total of 552 imprisoned military defaulters. Most of them were not released until the end of 1920.¹²⁰ However, the government had released Māori conscientious objectors eighteen months earlier, following a recommendation by the Religious Objectors Advisory Board. The board argued that, while Māoris did not meet the conditions for religious objection, they felt the claim that the Treaty of Waitangi was signed “to make peace” a valid one.¹²¹

The resistance to conscription by the Waikato highlights that their identity as a people did not depend on their being accepted by the majority of New Zealanders—Pākehā or Māori. While identity can be imposed on a community, it can also be shaped and created within a group to give legitimacy and purpose. Guided by an understanding of themselves as a people, the Waikato refused to conform during a time of crisis to the prevailing ideal of loyalty to a British king and patriotism to the nation of New Zealand. After all, they had their own king and their own nation. While the Waikato stayed at home, those Māori who went overseas experienced a range of new and often unexpected challenges that shaped their understanding of themselves. Whether they were in Egypt, fighting at Gallipoli, serving as pioneers on the Western Front, or on leave in Britain, the Māoris engaged with and connected to people from across the British Empire. This led to encounters in varied geographical spaces across different cultures and languages, which highlighted the challenges and opportunities that mobility offered during the war for young men leaving home for the first time.

Māori men had been recruited by a deeply gendered discourse that identified them as natural soldiers. For Māoris who had served in Gallipoli, that was the moment they demonstrated to themselves and to soldiers from around the empire

that they were able to conduct themselves with courage and tenacity in battle. Once the battalion moved to the Western Front, there is some evidence that not all Māori soldiers were happy to be formed into a pioneer unit.¹²² Shortly after they arrived in France, Buck supported the desire of the men to take part in a night raid to capture Germans. The request was approved by headquarters, who ordered that “No rifles or bayonets will be taken. Officers and sappers will carry revolvers. Other ranks will be armed with meres...only Māori will be spoken by all parties.”¹²³ A *mere* was a short, tear-shaped, flat weapon made of stone or *pounamu* (greenstone). For a Māori man, his *mere* was a symbol of his identity as a man—it was a family treasure, and a very effective close-combat weapon. Although the raid was not considered militarily successful, it was seen as a morale booster. The order to use the Māori language was obviously to confuse the Germans, but it also suggests the soldiers all spoke fluent Māori. For most of them, it would have been their first language and the one they were most comfortable speaking. Many Māoris were Anglicans—chaplain Henare Wepiha Te Wainohu sailed with the First Māori Contingent—but this did not necessarily mean they worshipped in English. At a communion service for the NZEF before the August attacks at Gallipoli, both languages could be heard coming from the gathered men, as the Māori sang hymns and prayed in Māori.¹²⁴ How many of the soldiers in the ranks were literate in English is unclear, but, although the Māori Committee stressed that junior officers and NCOs needed to be fluent in both languages, many rank and file soldiers probably were not. In November 1914, in recognition that many Māoris did not read or write English, the New Zealand Telegraph Department issued instructions that personal telegrams could be written in Māori. This was an amendment to a regulation at the outbreak of war that all transmissions needed to be in English or French. In 1916, a woman in New Zealand who had sent a comfort parcel to the front received a thank you from a Māori soldier that was described as written in “broken English.”¹²⁵

Response of Māori to their Service

Over time, the essential, often dangerous engineering work done at the front by the Māori pioneers seems to have become acceptable to them, perhaps because it required skills perfected by Māori in the past: building forts, trenches, and other defence systems to protect against other iwi, and then later against the British. As William Bertrand, a Māori private who had volunteered in 1916, later recollected, “someone had to do the job...that was the job allotted...at Passchendaele that really was a rough show... We lost quite a lot of men, our trench diggers, it was a hot spot.”¹²⁶ Bertrand obviously felt his dangerous work was vital to the war and that it was a soldier’s duty to do what was required of him. He also remembered that he mixed well with Pākehā New Zealanders as “one big happy family,” and that when he visited Britain there was “no sign of any distinction.”¹²⁷ Māori soldiers seem to have had no difficulty dating British women—as one soldier wrote home “there is a lot of girls here that need looking after.”¹²⁸ At least one soldier met his wife in Britain. Under the heading of “War Wedding Romance,” local newspapers reported the marriage of Peter Poi-Poi, who had been wounded at Gallipoli, to Winifred Alderton.¹²⁹ Not all Māoris felt positively about their experiences—some were bitter, feeling that promises to treat them like Europeans had not been fulfilled, and that

they were going home the way “we came out.”¹³⁰ The insistence of Māori leaders that Māoris serve in a separate unit might well have added to their feelings of difference, as after Gallipoli this meant they were housed in their own camp separate from Pākehā New Zealanders.¹³¹

These different reactions to service highlight that there was no one common experience at the front or behind the lines. How well men adapted to challenges would have depended on many factors, but a Pākehā education and an ability to navigate different worlds developed prior to the war would have made it easier to adapt overseas. Rikihana Carkeek enlisted as a private in the First Māori Contingent, served for a time as batman to Buck, and was later promoted to second lieutenant. He had been educated at Te Aute College, the same school as Buck and Ngata, and was fluent in both languages. He became ill shortly after arriving on the Western Front, and spent much of 1916 recovering in Britain. In his journal, he discussed the journeys he took around the country in a very positive way. He mixed easily with both Pākehā and Māori soldiers, and he used “New Zealander” in an inclusive way, suggesting he comfortably identified as a Māori and as a New Zealander. This may have reflected his love for his country, and that as a soldier far from home “he stood shoulder to shoulder with his Pākehā brothers.” On his return to New Zealand, his Māori heritage remained central to his life. He worked on the land, and served as an interpreter at the Māori Land Court, which adjudicated land claims.¹³²

The experience of Māori soldiers in Britain was undoubtedly shaped by a general interest in them and a gratitude for their service. British newspapers regularly published accounts of Māoris at the front or recuperating in Britain, and these were often accompanied by pictures of the men. Since the turn of the century, accounts about Māoris in New Zealand and during visits to Britain had been published in the press. So most British understood that Māoris came from New Zealand and that they were now loyal subjects of the crown. In 1901, the visit of the future king George V and his wife to New Zealand received extensive coverage in the press, and romanticised descriptions of Māoris were an important part of the coverage.¹³³ While accounts of Māori built on narratives that had been established earlier during the war the soldiers tended to be represented more as individuals than as idealised types. In 1915, the *Dundee Courier* published a long article written by Matthew Niania, a Māori soldier recovering locally after Gallipoli. Niania stated that he had long wanted to visit the “Mother Country” and then gave a detailed description of his family life, why he and his father had enlisted in the First Māori Contingent, and their experiences at Gallipoli. The article was illustrated with a picture of Niania and a page from his Māori-language Bible.¹³⁴ In 1917, an article describing a performance in Bristol by convalescing Māori for other war-wounded soldiers stressed they were “fighters” not “showmen,” and that they were “well-educated and intensely loyal.”¹³⁵ This shift in representation from earlier romanticised and naturalised portrayals may have been because the Māori performed in uniform.

After the war, the Pioneer Battalion was the only one of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to return to New Zealand as a complete unit. Because of this, it received a rousing welcome, with parades and receptions. In total, 2,227 Māori served overseas, but for some the homecoming was difficult.¹³⁶ Bertrand remembered his return sadly, as many members of his family had died from the influenza epidemic, which hit the Māori communities very hard.¹³⁷ In December 1918, a

letter to the editor was printed in the *New Zealand Herald* under the heading “Preserving the Māori.” The writer blamed the high number of Māori deaths on crowded living conditions because of loss of land, and then argued that the government should restore land, as the “Māori had fought side by side with our boys.”¹³⁸ In later life, Peter Tahitahi reflected that he was glad he had fought because he had travelled the world and he believed that he had helped to stop the Germans from “taking over our country.”¹³⁹

The war increased the visibility of Māori at home and overseas, creating a sense of familiarity with Māori culture and history that was shaped by the gendered martial discourse used to recruit and publicise their service in the war. While Māori soldiers were often portrayed in the British press as individuals, there was no recognition that there were different ways of identifying as Māori. In New Zealand newspapers, descriptions of the Māori were polarised: they were either loyal or disloyal, the Waikato being especially accused of disloyalty. So, an understanding of what it meant to be Māori was flattened into a discourse of loyalty to the nation of New Zealand, even though in reality Māoris usually identified first with their own iwi. In 1914, a Ngāpuhi chief wrote to Prime Minister Massey saying they were waiting for King George “to call us as a nation,” implying that his people identified as a separate nation within the wider British empire.¹⁴⁰ Over four years of war, the discourse around Māori recruitment reinforced the perception that Māori men were natural warriors who were willing to die for New Zealand. Their service allowed Māori leaders to make citizenship claims for their communities, to focus attention on strategies to improve Māori health and education, and to include returning soldiers in land settlement schemes.¹⁴¹ At the same time, the debates reinforced the perception that the Māori were one people, creating a more cohesive and unified understanding of what it meant to be Māori in the minds of New Zealanders.

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Notes

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 - 4 Carkeek, *Home Little Maori Home*, 32.
 - 5 ATL, Buck, MS-0196-3430A.
 - 6 ATL, AD 1 9/333.
 - 7 For the use of martial discourse in recruiting Māori men, see Franchesca Walker, "Descendants of a Warrior Race."
 - 8 King, *History of New Zealand*, 303.
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 - 64 Walker, *He Tipua*, 188.
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 - 67 *Dominion*, 16 March 1916.
 - 68 *Ibid.*
 - 69 Buck later referred to this as an "Irishman's promotion" because he lost his medical specialist pay, see Condliffe, *Man of Two Worlds*, 136.
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- 139 NAM, Tahitahi, Oral History Archives, 1999:3056.
- 140 *Northern Advocate*, 21 August 1914.
- 141 See Gould, "From Taiaha to Ko: Repatriation and Land Settlement for Maori Soldiers."