

Fact Sheet 1: New Zealand and the Second World War

The Second World War was the world's most destructive conflict. It took the lives of up to 50 million people. The 12,000 New Zealanders who died during the war might not seem like a large number by comparison, but at the time our population was under 2 million. On a per capita basis, this country's losses were the highest in the Commonwealth – approximately one out of every 150 New Zealanders died on war service.

Most New Zealanders accepted that our security depended on the survival of Britain and the outcome of the war in Europe. As a result, the majority of the 140,000 New Zealanders who served overseas were involved in the Mediterranean region, in Greece, Crete, North Africa and Italy. New Zealand forces also fought against the Japanese in the Pacific and took part in the post-war occupation of Japan. In each case, New Zealanders served as part of a larger Allied force, alongside British, Australian, American or other troops. Approximately 104,000 served in 2NZEF (the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force). The rest served in New Zealand or British naval and air forces. Back home, a further 100,000 New Zealanders enlisted in the Home Guard. In all, 67% of men aged between 18 and 45 served in the armed forces.

The mobilisation of New Zealanders for the war effort did not just involve military personnel. New Zealand devoted a very high proportion of its resources to the war effort and in particular to ensuring that Britain was fed. This extended to the rationing of many products here to ensure that as much as possible was sent to Britain. People not serving in the armed forces were also directed into jobs considered necessary to support the war effort. Many women gained opportunities to join the workforce, as did Māori who migrated into the cities to fill positions vacated by men overseas fighting.

The Second World War contributed to New Zealanders' developing sense of identity. The contribution of our soldiers in a number of key campaigns had increased our confidence about our role in the world. For instance, the exploits of the 28th (Māori) Battalion became a source of great pride to many New Zealanders.

Its contribution to the Second World War also encouraged New Zealand to express its opinions on the world stage and to seek ways to avoid a repetition of such a conflict. This country was one of 51 nations to sign the United Nations Charter in San Francisco on 26 June 1945. Those gathered declared: 'We, the peoples of the United Nations, are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.'

Fact sheet 2: A warrior tradition

Nearly 16,000 Maori enlisted for service during the Second World War. Around 3600 of these served in the army's 28th (Māori) Battalion, which became one of the most celebrated and decorated units in the history of the New Zealand armed forces. The Māori Battalion lost 649 men killed, while a further 1712 were wounded and 237 taken prisoner. This casualty rate was almost 50% higher than the average for the New Zealand infantry battalions.

Māori who fought in the Second World War drew on a long warrior tradition that extended far back before European contact. In older times the training of the male child from infancy to manhood was aimed at the perfection of the warrior class. Warriors of great experience and repute would teach the next generation the fighting traditions of Tūmatauenga, the god of war. In the *whare maire* (school of weaponry) and on the *parawhakawai* (training ground) young Māori men learnt how to thrust and parry with *taiaha* – in much the same way young Māori soldiers of the 20th century learned to use the bayonet with great effectiveness.

To die in the pursuit of the war god Tūmatauenga was considered a sacred duty and a manly death. Many hapu and iwi drew on the histories and exploits of warrior ancestors for inspiration. In pleading the case for Māori to be allowed to fight in the First World War, the MP for Northern Māori, Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck), appealed to this sense of history and tradition. When he arrived with the Native Contingent in Egypt in 1915, he said: 'our ancestors were a warlike people ... the members of this war party would be ashamed to face their people at the conclusion of the war if they were ... not given an opportunity of proving their mettle at the front'.

Māori continued to draw on this tradition in other conflicts since the end of the Second World War. Many Māori made service in the armed forces into a career; many continue to serve with distinction in the army, navy and air force. In 2007 Willie Apiata (Ngāpuhi and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui) was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery while serving in Afghanistan.

Fact Sheet 3: Māori participation in overseas wars

The South African War of 1899-1902 (often called the Boer War) was the first overseas conflict to involve New Zealand troops. New Zealanders reacted with great patriotism to the British Empire's call to arms. Wi Pere, the MP for Eastern Māori, offered to lead a contingent of 500 Māori to South Africa, but Imperial policy officially excluded 'natives' from fighting. It was considered unacceptable to use non-white troops in a 'white man's' war.

This did not stop a number of Māori with mixed ancestry enlisting for service under their English names. The authorities turned a blind eye to such enlistments. Māori communities also helped raise funds to support the South African war effort. A large carnival at Wellington in March 1900 was one of a number of such events. Māori entertained the audiences with haka such as 'Kikia te Poa' (Kick the Boer).

When the First World War broke out in 1914 there was some division amongst Māori as to whether they should participate. The four Māori MPs supported full involvement. The MP for Northern Māori, Te Rangi Hīroa (Peter Buck), enlisted and sailed with the first Native Contingent in February 1915. Originally it was not intended that this contingent would be a fighting unit. Eastern Māori MP Āpirana Ngata believed Māori involvement would strengthen their claims for equal status with Pākehā.

Other Māori opposed the war effort. Waikato leader Te Puea Hērangi questioned why Māori should fight for an Empire that had within living memory invaded, occupied and confiscated Māori land. When military conscription was applied to Māori in 1917, Waikato and other iwi that had suffered land confiscation in the 19th century mounted a campaign of resistance.

At the start of the First World War Imperial policy still excluded 'native peoples' from fighting in a war among Europeans. Again Māori enlisted for service using English names. Mounting casualties and the need for reinforcements on the Gallipoli Peninsula forced a change in Imperial policy. The Native Contingent got its chance to fight and eventually 50 members of the Contingent lost their lives at Gallipoli.

After Gallipoli the Native Contingent was reorganised as a Pioneer Battalion to serve on the Western Front. Pioneers were the labour force of the military, digging trenches, building roads, railways and carrying out other logistical tasks. This was essential and dangerous work, often carried out under fire.

By the end of the war, 2227 Māori (and 458 Pacific Islanders) had served in what became known as the Māori Pioneer Battalion. Of these, 336 died on active service and 734 were wounded. Other Māori enlisted (and died) in other New Zealand battalions.

Fact Sheet 4: Opposition to Māori going to war

When the Second World War began Māori leaders offered support for both home defence and overseas service. But not all openly supported Māori participation in the conflict. Some objected because they doubted the ability of Māori communities to maintain a combat force. They argued that casualties were bound to be numerous and that a population of around 90,000 could not maintain a constant flow of reinforcements. There were suggestions that Māori should be spread among Pākehā units to lessen the possibility of heavy losses. Others supported the idea of a pioneer role, similar to that performed on the Western Front in 1916-18.

As in the First World War, some iwi who had been negatively affected by the wars of the 1860s and the subsequent land confiscation objected to Māori troops being deployed overseas. They argued that any Māori unit formed should be kept in New Zealand for home service only.

A key figure once more was Waikato leader Te Puea Hērangi. She had led resistance when the government imposed conscription on Māori from Tainui–Waikato during the First World War. Some accused her of secretly supporting the Germans. Waikato men who refused to report for training when balloted in 1918 were arrested. Any who refused to wear army uniform were subjected to severe military punishments. In the end only a handful of the Tainui conscripts were ever put into uniform; none were sent overseas. But the imposition of conscription had long-lasting effects.

When war broke out again in 1939 Te Puea reaffirmed her opposition to Waikato people fighting overseas so long as the government ignored their land grievances. The government introduced conscription in May 1940 but wisely chose not to apply it to Māori. Te Puea told Prime Minister Peter Fraser in 1941, 'I'm not anti-Pākehā; I'm not pro-German; I'm pro-Māori.' Te Puea did soften her position, though, saying that any Waikato men who volunteered to enlist would not be stopped. By 1942 nearly 1000 Waikato men had volunteered for service.

Fact sheet 5: The formation of the 28th (Māori) Battalion

When the decision was made in October 1939 to form a Māori military unit one suggestion was to call it the ‘Treaty of Waitangi’ battalion. It was felt that this would draw the attention of both Māori and Pākehā to their respective obligations under the Treaty. Article Three of the Treaty spoke of the rights and obligations of British subjects, something Āpirana Ngata saw as ‘the price of citizenship’. He believed that if Māori were to have a say in shaping the future of the nation after the war, they needed to participate fully during it. It was also a matter of pride. As Ngata asked, ‘how can we ever hold up our heads, when the struggle is over, to the question, “Where were you when New Zealand was at war?”’

Officially called the New Zealand 28th (Māori) Battalion, the unit was part of the 2nd New Zealand Division, the fighting arm of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF). The NZ Division was made up of 15,000-20,000 men, divided into three infantry brigades (the 4th, 5th and 6th Brigades) plus artillery, engineers, signals, medical and service units. Each brigade initially had three infantry battalions (numbered from 18th to 26th). The 28th (Māori) Battalion was at times attached to each of the Division's three brigades. Each battalion was commanded by a lieutenant-colonel. The Māori Battalion usually contained 700-750 men, divided into five companies.

The Māori Battalion’s four rifle companies were organised on a tribal basis:

- A Company was based on recruits from Northland and Auckland (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua and other tribes)
- B Company consisted of men from Rotorua, Bay of Plenty, Taupō, and the Thames–Coromandel areas (mostly from the Arawa confederation and Tūhoe tribes)
- C Company was drawn from the Tairāwhiti/East Coast region (Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata and sub-tribes)
- D Company drew its men from a much wider area, covering the Waikato–Maniapoto confederation, the Taranaki, Wellington and Manawatū–Horowhenua tribes, Ngāti Kahungunu of Hawke’s Bay–Wairarapa, the entire South Island, the Chathams and Stewart Island, as well a small number of recruits from the Pacific Islands.

The Battalion’s fifth company, Headquarters, drew its personnel from all over Māoridom.

While conscription for non-Māori was introduced at the end of May 1940, Māori enlistment remained voluntary throughout the war. In the end close to 16,000 Māori joined up. They volunteered for many reasons: some to escape poverty or the boredom of life in the backblocks, others to follow their mates or seek adventure. Most Māori recruits served in areas such as home defence, artillery, engineering and service corps. Some joined the air force and navy. But it is the 20% that fought with the famous Māori Battalion that are best

remembered. These men established a formidable reputation as one of New Zealand's finest fighting forces. This was highlighted by the actions of men such as Victoria Cross recipient Te Moananui-a-Kiwa Ngārimu, Haane Manahi and Charlie Shelford, among many others.

Fact sheet 6: The impact of the war on Māori

‘We will lose some of the most promising of our young leaders,’ wrote Sir Āpirana Ngata during the war. ‘We have lost a few already. But we will gain the respect of our Pakeha brothers and the future of our race as a component and respected part of the New Zealand people will be less precarious.’

Of the more than 3600 men who served voluntarily with the Māori Battalion 649 were killed or died on active service. A total of 1712 were wounded and another 237 were taken prisoner. This casualty rate was almost 50% higher than the average for the New Zealand infantry battalions.

The Second World War was a significant turning point in the relationship between Māori and Pākehā. The contribution and reputation of the Māori Battalion was a source of great pride to the wider New Zealand community. The ceremony held at Ruatoria on 6 October 1943 to posthumously honour the Battalion's Victoria Cross winner, 2nd Lieutenant Te Moananui-a-Kiwa Ngārimu, was one of the biggest events staged during the war years. The Governor-General, Sir Cyril Newall, Prime Minister Peter Fraser, and more than 7000 Māori from all over New Zealand attended the event. It was filmed by the National Film Unit and later screened to Māori Battalion soldiers in Italy.

The war presented Māori with new opportunities to enter paid employment. Many migrated to the urban centres to fill positions in munitions factories and other essential industries. In 1936 just over 11% of Māori lived in urban areas; by 1951 the figure was closer to 23%. Māori and Pākehā were now in greater contact with each other. This posed new challenges for Māori who had to adjust to life in the city away from the support of their whānau. Some faced discrimination in the cities when it came to things such as rental accommodation and access to places like pubs, hotels and restaurants.

The government promised that confiscation claims would be settled at the end of the war. Unlike the years after the First World War, Māori servicemen were also promised greater access to post-war rehabilitation assistance. There was some reason for Māori to look to the future with renewed confidence. Āpirana Ngata's son Henare was an officer in the Māori Battalion. He wrote:

... in a wider sense, the fact that Maori took an active part in the war produced a number of positive things. Maori have a higher profile in New Zealand life. The Treaty of Waitangi has been given a status unthought of pre-war. Maori is no longer a declining population, nor a dying race. Can it be claimed that these changes took place because Maori men went to World War Two? Probably not. But can it be said that these changes would have taken place if the Allies lost the war?