

## **‘There was no honour in it’: Two aspects of New Zealand’s military history.**

*The following is a transcript of a talk given by John Crawford and Matthew Buck and recorded live at Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa the National Library of New Zealand on 3 November 2021. A question and answer session that followed the talk is also included.*

### *Transcript*

**Sarah Burgess:** Kia ora and welcome to the New Zealand History podcast channel, where you'll find talks on Aotearoa New Zealand history, culture and society. These talks are organised by Manatū Taonga, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage with the support of the Alexander Turnbull Library. They're recorded live either via Zoom, or in person at Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, the National Library of New Zealand.

Before we get into this talk, just a warning that it does contain material that may be distressing to some listeners. Please check the Episode notes for more detailed descriptions and exact time markers in case you'd like to skip this content. Please take care of yourself, and if you don't think this talk is for you, no worries, and we hope you'll listen again soon.

**Neill Atkinson:** Kia ora koutou. I'm delighted today to introduce John Crawford and Matthew Buck, New Zealand Defence Force historians who have been doing some really interesting work through on the boundary between academic history and public policy. And recently, they were the authors of a really important work Phenomenal and Wicked: Attrition and Reinforcement in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli, which revolutionised our understanding of that campaign. A campaign, which many New Zealanders probably assume that they knew, they knew everything they need to know. And Manatū Taonga, Ministry for Culture and Heritage was really pleased to be able to support

that project. And of course, it drew on the wonderful resources of Archives New Zealand, National Library and other institutions.

So John Crawford is going to speak first, about a probably a rather less well-known aspect of New Zealand's first World War history on the Senussi campaign in Libya. And then following that Matthew will, will speak on the distribution of medals after the Second World War and the policy, how the policy developed around that. So, John, please come and kick us off.

**John Crawford:** Thank you, Neil. That was a great relief to get my mask off, I must say. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. Thank you for coming to listen to us today. And thank you to the National Library, and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage for hosting this event.

Well, Matt and I both work in the Heritage, Commemorations and Protocol group of Headquarters New Zealand Defence Force, and we're members of the Heritage team. And we do a wide variety of work, but quite a bit of it actually relates to things that happened a long time ago in the past, but are still of interest to the Defence Force or to members of the public. So in Matthew's case that might mean looking to identify human remains from the First World War and for me, it can mean questions relating to the inclusion of deceased military personnel on the National War Memorial Roll of Honour. That as a Defence Force historian I also have a major historical project underway usually, and at the moment that is a book about New Zealand's campaigns against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

One small part of that book will look at the Senussi Campaign of 1915, 1916, which took place on the border between Egypt and Libya. It's the area of eastern Mediterranean, so looking around Mersa

Matruh through towards the Libyan border. Now I'm going to concentrate on one aspect of a major engagement in that campaign.

Now the Senussi are a Sufi sect established in the 19th century, and still are quite influential across North Africa. Their headquarters are in Cyrenaica, what was then the Ottoman provinces Tripolitania, now Libya, and when the Italians invaded Tripolitania in 1911, the small Ottoman garrison and local people, most prominent leader Senussi, launched a very effective campaign of resistance, which confined the Italian invaders to enclaves along the coast. One of the Ottoman officers involved in that campaign was Mustafa Kemal later Atatürk, the founder of modern Egypt.

In October 1914 war broke out between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain and its allies. Just over a year later, in November 1915, the Ottoman military mission in Libya convinced the Senussi that they should invade Egypt. Following on from the Sultan's declaration of a Jihad that was a very important point for Senussi. Now the Senussi were not that keen. They'd had pretty good relations with the British and could see that invading Egypt, which was British controlled of course, could have very serious consequences for their movement. The Ottomans hoped that as Senussi invasion of Western Egypt, combined with further operations by the forces against the Suez Canal, would spark a popular uprising in Egypt. And in fact, the Senussi invasion did lead to a little bit of unrest in Egypt, but nothing with potential.

So in November 1915, the Senussi pushed across the border from Libya into Western Egypt and occupied a large area along the coast there. The British responded to the Senussi invasion by forming the Western Frontier Force, which was a real Imperial undertaking involving troops from Britain, India, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Now for the military historians, the Senussi campaigns were

interesting for a number of reasons. But one of them is the sort of contrasting technology you get. So here we have a photograph of New Zealand soldiers with camels and camel drivers during the campaign. The Western Frontier Force was quite dependent on camels for mobility, the Senussi were utterly dependent on them. Now on the other hand, you get quite modern technology. So here's a crashed British reconnaissance aircraft. Now, in spite of the mishaps, the two reconnaissance aircraft the British had played an absolutely crucial role in the campaign because they help them to locate the pretty elusive Senussi forces.

Now two New Zealand units took part in the campaign. In November, the First Battalion New Zealand Rifle Brigade was used to hold a number of defensive posts defending the one railway line that ran from Alexandria towards the Libyan border. This was an absolutely crucial supply line for the British. In mid-December, they were joined by the First Battalion New Zealand Rifle Brigade, which was landed at Mersa Matruh, a small port near the Libyan border.

Now on Christmas Eve 1915 aerial reconnaissance identified that a substantial Senussi force about 5000 strong had occupied a position on ridges running north-south, the western frontier force moved out to attack the Senussi force. Now the Senussi force was made up of some regulatory personnel both Ottoman troops and Senussi regulars who was commanded by an officer from the Ottoman army but consisted mainly of tribesmen, some of whom had their families with them. Now in the engagement on Christmas Day 1915, the New Zealanders ended up doing the bulk of the fighting. Basically, what happened was the New Zealanders came round the ridge down the road, then moved off to attack the ridge and forced the Senussi off that ridge in the morning. In the afternoon, the fighting pivoted, it

turned towards the face the coast because the Senussi had withdrawn into a complex and deep ravine system called Wadi Majid.

In the afternoon the New Zealanders attack the Senussi in those positions and in spite of heavy but rather inaccurate fire from the Senussi, got under the Wadi, force them down, the Wadi towards the coast, and other troops advanced along the top of the sides of the Wadi. Most of the Senussi managed to escape, but it turned into a significant defeat for them. They lost about 370 dead and had a lot of people captured. British losses were a lot lighter. A total of 13 dead and 51 wounded. The fact that when the First Battalion, the Rifle Brigade took the leading part and the fighting is reflected in the fact that they had six dead and 18 wounded, two of the wounded later died.

Now, this disparity in casualties, has gone uncommented on largely by historians. But as soon as I saw it, I thought it was very extreme. It's almost sort of Omdurman from the liberation or reconquest for the Sudan style. And it made me think what actually happened on Christmas Day 1915. Were some of those who were killed not in fact combatants. Now the New Zealand troops continued to be involved in the campaign and are involved in some of our engagements, and then withdrawn in February 1916. Fighting continued into 1917 when the Senussi signed a peace deal with the British.

Now as part of my research, I found fewer than ten first-hand accounts by New Zealand soldiers of the engagement on Christmas Day. Now, three of these accounts really gave me pause for thought, especially as they relate to one of the key themes in my book, which is how conceptions of race impacted on the conduct of military operations against the Ottoman Empire, and on the behaviour of New Zealand and other allied troops.

So I'd like to begin with this cartoon, which gives you some conception of how New Zealanders in New Zealand view the Senussi. They were seen as sort of cowardly brigands. So here we've got a large kiwi, chasing the Senussi across the desert with the pyramids in the background. So not very accurate historically, or geographically, but it gives you a flavour for the time.

This is the first quote, this is from a letter, very detailed letter that appeared in Sergeant Sidney Mogridge local newspaper. In it he describes what happened when his company overrun a Senussi position. And it says, quote, "We killed about 15 of this party, wounded several others, and captured about 16. I had my camera and photographed them. After we'd finished them off, they continued to advance." No prisoners are recorded as being taken by the New Zealanders in this part of the engagement. And it seems likely that as Mogridge suggests, a number of Senussi fighters that fell into the hands of the New Zealanders were then killed.

Now my second slide comes from the diary of rifleman Walter Handley, which is held upstairs at the Alexander Turnbull library like so many of our national treasures. Handley describes how he and his comrades advanced down Wadi Majid and there encountered quote, "an old woman [who] came out of a hut. We passed her, but Sergt. W of 5 platoon shot her as he came up afterwards". Several Arabs were killed in this area where there are a number of huts. It's unclear whether they were combatants or non-combatants. My third quote is from a letter written by rifleman Alfred McCaw. Now, it's from an interesting collection of first-hand accounts collected for the proposed New Zealand official war history after the First World War, and this is what he says. He describes how the most intense fighting took place in Wadi Majid and he writes what he saw, quote, "a sight that will not be forgotten for a long time. All along were dead men, in all attitudes, and dead and wounded camels, donkeys, goats

and one or two sheep. We shot or bayoneted all wounded Arabs, and animals". Now other accounts I have, talked about the killing of livestock, including about 80 camels in the Wadi and around about, but no one else talks about the killing of wounded enemies combatants. It was standard practice during the campaign for British forces to kill or drive off any livestock they came across. Because of course, the Senussi as a nomadic tribal people were extremely dependent on their livestock.

Now these three accounts make it pretty clear that some New Zealand soldiers during the engagement on Christmas Day killed non-combatants, prisoners and wounded enemy. It is rather shocking to think of New Zealand soldiers committing war crimes. But I'm afraid in the past these were more common than you might like to think. Sometimes New Zealand soldiers were perpetrators, and sometimes they were victims of such crimes. Now what led to this disgraceful conduct. Well, there are a number of factors but the key thing I think, was how New Zealanders perceived their enemy. Now, as I noted before, in New Zealand, they are seen as rather, the Senussi was seen as rather cowardly, brigandy sort of people. But the New Zealand soldiers who fought them had a rather, rather different view and in some areas, more extreme view of their enemy.

Firstly, the great majority of New Zealand soldiers had a pronounced feeling of racial superiority over Arabs in general. Degrading and unpleasant terms to describe Arabs were widely used. So, poor Egyptians were sometimes described as 'town rats'. And in fact, I would, there are much more offensive terms used, but I will not talk about them. A significant proportion of New Zealand soldiers also meted out casual violence to ordinary Egyptians. And I found that quite shocking when I read the accounts.

Now, there is, in my view, a continuum between the use of derogatory terms to describe and to an extent, dehumanise people. To using a stick to beat a beggar who annoys you, to killing a wounded tribesmen after an engagement. Secondly, the New Zealanders had a particularly dim view of the Senussi. They regarded them as being very primitive, even by Egyptian standards. They were seen as vicious, treacherous and dangerous, basically. New Zealand soldiers were, for example, told by their officers that the Senussi routinely tortured to death, any enemy soldiers that fell into their hands. This conception of the enemy as dangerous savages, who are a little less than human, made it much easier for some New Zealand soldiers to behave with great brutality towards the Senussi.

So to conclude, you might wonder why we chose, 'there was no honour in it', as part of our title. Well for my paper, seemed most appropriate because the actions of some New Zealand soldiers on Christmas Day 1915 were a terrible stain on the conduct of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the First World War. And now for something completely different. I'm going to hand over to my colleague Matthew Buck, who will speak about the distribution of medals, after the Second World War.

**Matthew Buck:** Ngā mihi ki a koutou. Thank you very much, John. As John said my name is Matthew Buck, and I'm the Senior Advisor Heritage for the New Zealand Defence Force. In 2020, the NZDF conducted a survey of the military service files of C Company 28 Māori Battalion, after a question was asked about why many members of the company seem never to have received their Second World War campaign medals.

The survey found that of the 980 known members of the Company, medals had never been issued to 145 of them or 15% or to their families. This led directly to an investigation into the way that the distribution of Second World War campaign medals had been planned and implemented. These days,



World War II medals are frequently regarded as priceless family taonga. What emerged from our research was that the veterans themselves had placed a very different value on them. They were not by and large, particularly well received.

The first slide is a photo of 26th Battalion reunion in Christchurch in 1981, just over 40 years ago. Dozens of very similar photos of other unit reunions can be found. The men are smartly dressed in suits and blazers, but only a very few of them are wearing medals. Why this was so is what I'm talking about today. When planning for the distribution of Second World War medals began in 1946, it was initially assumed that it would closely resemble the issue of First World War medals during the early 1920s. After World War One New Zealand veterans were entitled to no more than three British Imperial Medals, which were manufactured in the United Kingdom between 1920 and 1925. Around 220,000 of these medals were distributed to about 90,000 of the 100,000 eligible New Zealanders. Every medal was inscribed with a name, rank and serial number, and they were posted out automatically to the last known address of each recipient recorded on their military service files. This did not always go smoothly. In about 10% of cases, no forwarding address or surviving family members could be traced. Even in 1960, over 18,000 unclaimed medals were still held by the Defence Department.

It rapidly became apparent to the planners in after 1946, however, that for World War II medals, this would be a very difficult model to follow. After World War Two, there were no fewer than 11 different campaign medals, which could be awarded to New Zealanders. And if the various clasps are included, there were effectively 14 different types. As in the 1920s, all the medals were manufactured in the United Kingdom. The eligibility criteria were also very much more complex. There were particular

problems, moreover, regarding Air Force and Navy personnel. This was because the majority had served in Royal Air Force and Royal Naval units, whose records were all held in the United Kingdom.

The greatest source of difficulty, however, was that there were four times as many eligible veterans 105,000 Army, 50,000 Air Force and 12,000 Navy, plus an additional 227,000 Territorial Force and Home Guard personnel who had served exclusively in New Zealand. In all, just over a million medals would need to be distributed. The New Zealand War Service Medal caused particular problems. It was originally intended as a way of recognising wartime service in New Zealand, but it was swiftly extended to cover overseas service as well. But it was not until early 1950 that significant stocks of this medal were received in New Zealand, and medal distribution could finally begin. Five years after the end of the war and 11 years after its commencement, there was a high probability that the address information about veterans held on military service files would be out of date. In these circumstances, it was far from clear that posting out medals automatically would be feasible.

Equally endowed by this time was the idea of engraving the medals. Even if the army's engraving capacity was quadrupled, it was calculated engraving them all would take at least six years. Particularly influential in this regard was information received in June 1947 that the United Kingdom planned not to engrave names on the medals for British veterans. Orders for new engraving machines were cancelled when the New Zealand government decided to do likewise, a few months later. No one knew yet, though, just how unpopular this actually was until the British began issuing the medals in June 1948. The controversy experienced in Britain was mild, however, compared to Australia.

The Australian government began issuing medals automatically and unengraved in October 1948. But this caused such a storm of protest from the Returned Services League that the program was almost

immediately suspended. As a result, when Australian issues recommenced in June 1949, the medals were engraved, although veterans had to apply for them. Interestingly, in New Zealand, the Returned and Services Association chose not to comment when the engraving controversies raged in Britain and Australia. When the Australians changed course, however, the RSA general conference immediately demanded that New Zealand medals also be engraved.

In the end, it fell to Sidney Holland's newly elected National government to make the decision in early 1950. The Holland government made its decision about how, when and in what form Second World War medals were to be issued at a Cabinet meeting in February 1950. These were that the medals were to be issued unengraved and that the veterans would have to apply for them. Issues commenced on the 14th of March 1950. Slide three shows the application form that veterans were required to fill in. Applicants had to provide numerous details to show why they qualified for each of the 14 different medals and clasps. It was far more complex than the forms used in other Commonwealth countries, and almost guaranteed to deter applications.

Critical to the government's decision was the Australian experience which by February 1950 had demonstrated conclusively that only a minority of Australian veterans were willing to apply for their medals, despite the fact that they were being engraved. Similar data from the United Kingdom, where uptake had been barely 20%, convinced cabinet that New Zealand veterans would almost certainly act likewise, whether the medals were engraved or not. Data collected over the first 14 months of issues to Army veterans, who represented about 77% of all those eligible, show that the government's pessimism was more than justified. From a peak of just shy of 6000 applications in the second week, applications more than halved four weeks later, and from July the average fell to only 198 applications

per week for the rest of the reporting period. The total received over the 14 months was 43,658, or just 22% of the approximately 200,000 former full-time army veterans believed to be eligible.

Particularly striking however, is the blue line on this chart, which shows the rate of applications from former Home Guard personnel. Only 2699 applied for their medals by 18th of May 1951, or just 2.16% of the 125,000 eligible veterans. Slide five shows the corresponding issue statistics. The blue line shows the rate at which medal groups were sent out to those who had applied. The orange line shows issues to the next of kin of those who died during the war, which were issued automatically without the need for application. A special program beginning in 1948 to establish correct address information made this possible. 98% of the 8300-odd medal groups sent to this category were dispatched in the first week.

There is nothing to indicate that the rate of medal applications increased appreciably after 1951.

Towards the end of 1953, despite a slight increase in demand because of the impending royal visit, total applications across all three services had barely reached 25%. Local RSAs complained bitterly that the lack of engraving and the need to apply, although there were disagreements about which was most important, had effectively made the medals quote 'valueless'. But it is clear that there must have been other and perhaps more fundamental reasons for the low demand.

Government concessions such as effectively abandoning the application forms and allowing local RSAs to apply en masse on behalf of their memberships, failed to appreciably increase applications. By the end of 1955, these still stood at only 26%. Even if the 125,000 Home Guard personnel were discounted because so few had or were ever likely to apply, the success rate was still less than 38%. By 1960, after a major publicity campaign and the complete abandonment of the complicated form, this had crept up to only around 40%. No further statistics appear to have been collected after 1960 and the only data

after that currently available is the 2020 survey of issues made to the 980 men of C Company 28 Māori Battalion.

Slide five shows these results. The blue line shows that the number of medals dispatched between 1950 and 2019. The relatively high uptake over 30% in 1950 was largely caused by the issues made to the next of kin of deceased men who made up 19% of the 980 men who served in the company. We would expect to see very similar results from other infantry units, who suffered far heavier casualties than other army units. After 1950, however, the rate of uptake immediately collapsed to an average of less than 1% per annum, which closely mirrors the rest of the armed forces. The orange line you can see on this chart shows the cumulative percentage who did receive their medals.

You'll notice that after about 1971, this curve flattens into a steady rate of just under 1% per annum, slowly but surely reaching a cumulative total of 85% in 2019. In the later decades an increasing proportion of the claims will have originated with families, rather than the veterans themselves. The NZDF certainly contributed to this pattern because it has been standard practice for many years to alert families about unclaimed medals when they have contacted the NZDF for other reasons, most often in connection with funeral arrangements.

So what are we to make of this? Why were veterans so reluctant to claim their medals? The question was both unasked and unanswered. No attempt was ever made to ask the veterans not least, one suspects, because it had so little discernible political impact. Members of Parliament and ministers did not see their inboxes flooded with angry letters from their constituents about this issue. All that really survives are rare articles in the press or the RSA review, and a handful of letters from veterans preserved at Archives New Zealand.

Slide six is a quote from one of these letters written in December 1950. “A man is up to feel that it appears conceited to publicly ask for his medals which he earned only by doing his duty. I know that I like many others would not think of wearing my medals, when all my comrades would know that I had asked for them.” For many then, having to apply was an insuperable barrier. But it was one which with a little effort and imagination could have been overcome.

The proof was provided by the Royal New Zealand Navy. The fifteenth question on the medals application form asked sailors if they had served at least 180 days at sea in a naval vessel? If the answer was yes, they are entitled to a five pound ten shilling payment courtesy of the British Admiralty. The result was that almost all of the 12,000 eligible former Royal New Zealand Navy personnel had applied for and received their medals by the end of 1953.

It would be dangerous, however, to assume that all veterans had identical views or motivations. All that we can really say with confidence is that in the immediate post-war environment, the majority attached little value to their medals. They seemed a poor recompense for the service they had given and the opportunity costs of that service. In many cases, it would take decades for these attitudes to soften. Thank you very much.

[applause]

Any questions?

**Audience member 1:** How did the UK service medals? How are they issued? Were they applied for or were they actually?

**Matthew Buck:** So yes, the UK had a very similar system. It was an application system. And again, the medals were unengraved and the New Zealand government quite openly followed that example and when the medals were first issued in 1950, they said just like the UK, so what we're doing is fine, because it's good enough for the UK. The UK experience was that they was universally disliked. Again, they had exactly the same problems. The issue rate, the application rate was just as disastrous as it was in New Zealand. It was also extremely bad in Canada. In Australia by 1954, only 34% of Army veterans had bothered to apply and their medals were engraved. We don't - I don't have data for elsewhere in the Commonwealth yet.

**Audience member 2:** Nothing has changed in some respects. I did 30 years' service total, regular and territorial. And when the new long service medal was being administered, we applied, again, and it was sent out in an envelope. You know, no suggestion of any presentations or anything like that. So I think the attitudes towards it don't seem to have changed terribly much. Least for some of us. Yeah. You don't have to say anything about that. [laughs]

**Audience member 3:** Kia ora. Thank you both for really interesting presentations. I had a question about the service medals. I'm just wondering whether you'd seen any data on the take up by Merchant Navy people, given that they were also eligible for campaign medals for their time on the convoys. I realise they're not part of the Defence Force. But just wondering if you've seen anything on that.

**Matthew Buck:** Oh no, I regret to say I have found no data at all about Merchant Navy. And it would be, I'm sure, if that data is held, it'd be completely different set of files from the Defence Department. So no, I'm sorry, I can't answer your question.

**Audience member 4:** Oh sorry, sorry, Matthew, I have two questions. One is people had to apply for their war service gratuity, after the Second World War. What was the uptake of that compared to the medal application? And the second part of it was the reaction against, from some of the soldiers against, more against the number of medals and the fact that a large number of people, including woman who served in Africa and Italy, got them got the same medal as those who had done fighting.

**Matthew Buck:** Okay, so yes, I can answer both these questions. War services gratuity was quite a considerable sum of money which was awarded to those who had served during the war. It was introduced fairly late in the war, and it was part of a program across the Commonwealth actually to improve the morale of the fighting forces, which had been sagging a bit to say the least. And it did have a major effect actually, in getting people over the line for those last few months. The application rates in New Zealand for the war service gratuity was about 98%. Very rapidly as well, it didn't take long to reach that number. And all that was left, really, the remaining 2% were sums of money that were so small that they were hardly worth applying for. Now, in terms of motivations for not applying, yes, you brought up a very good point. It's rare to find veterans speaking, frankly, about how they really felt. But there is one particularly interesting article that appeared in the RSA review in the late 1950s, in which at least one veteran opens up a bit about what some of the problems had been. And what he basically says is that there was insufficient granularity with the medals that were being provided, despite the fact that there were 11 of them. It was felt that they simply didn't recognise the particular services and particular sacrifices of particular groups within the armed forces. And in New Zealand context that would particularly related to those who'd served early in the war in Greece and Crete, for example, and had been volunteers for those campaigns. There was no medal to show, actually, that they had been there. The nearest that anyone could get was the North Africa Star. So they were simply lumped into



later groups who they felt had not been through the same experiences. And you see this phenomenon as it were of veterans wishing to have only a small issue, as it were, to a select group. Over and over again, in subsequent decades, many of our medal grievances are about that, are about recognising a particular group with a particular very well-defined time period to establish an 'in group' that really only includes them. So that was an issue. Also disliked was the number of people who could qualify, they were handed out too indiscriminately, it was felt. Those who had only been involved in the rear areas would get the same campaign medals. And it was particularly noted in a really sexist way that women could get them too and this caused some umbrage. So those were some of the realities, and again, fed into the narrative that many felt that the medals didn't have any value.

**Audience member 5:** Question for John, my World War One history has long since disappeared. But could you just give the context which within that battle against the Senussi existed, who had those troops fought with before and was there a different nature of that encounter versus some of the earlier ones?

**John Crawford:** Well, that's a good question. The Rifle Brigade was formed later in the war. And they were known as the 'dinks' because they were, well there's various theories, but the one that I like is that because they enlisted after the heavy, long casualty lists from Gallipoli started to had to come back to New Zealand, these were men who still enlisted, and they were regarded as dinkum soldiers. They are also very well drilled. So that's another reason why they're called dinkum soldiers apparently. But yes, they came, they just arrived in Egypt at the time the Senussi invaded, just a couple weeks beforehand. And the British were short of trained infantry. So they were immediately moved off to the western desert. And they actually did remarkably well considering they'd just got off the ship, they

weren't really acclimatised so they were basically pretty well trained and fit men and they adapted pretty well. All the - in the research I've done for my book, the worst incidences of crime against other groups by New Zealand personnel all relate to Arab civilians, not to Ottoman military personnel.

**Audience member 5:** John, I think, when you quoted Sidney Mogridge I think was you said his letter was published in the local paper. So I'm interested in the fact that this was a published letter, was there any reaction to the fairly graphic description?

**John Crawford:** Not that I could find, which tells you something about public attitudes, I think. It is quite striking from the end of 1914 period, up to 1916, the number of letters that are published in New Zealand newspapers, by soldiers, and the military censorship system was not working well at all in Egypt. And the language used is very revealing. Some of the, yeah, really offensive terms used, and they go without comment, either from editorial comment in the newspaper, or from letters to the editor, it's really quite striking.

**Audience member 6:** Yeah John, you didn't talk about the leadership or the orders that were passed on to the soldiers or the brigade for their action or requirement in relation to prisoners, etc? Is it because you don't have that information, or you don't think it's relevant for this?

**John Crawford:** I do have the orders given, operational orders given to the units involved. And they do not say kill all the prisoners. Or don't take any prisoners. They are pretty standard stuff. So the treatment of prisoners is, is not dealt with explicitly. But what I would say is that the New Zealanders

took quite a few prisoners, some of whom were badly wounded, and including quite a number of women and children after the action Christmas Day.

**Audience member 7:** Did these prisoners get any treatment if they had been wounded?

**John Crawford:** Yes, yes. They were, as far as I can tell, they were treated well. So you know, what I'm saying is, it's not all the New Zealand soldiers involved in this engagement behaved very badly. It seems to have been some, but when you get three out of roughly ten, first-hand accounts, talking about war crimes or leading to them, you then think, yes, this was a significant issue on that day.

**Audience member 7:** And also, where would they take the prisoners to? They didn't have a holding place to confine them?

**John Crawford:** Yes, there was a, back at Mersa Matruh there's like a compound. But I think quite a few of the - women and children, as far as I can gather, were let go quite quickly. They didn't want to hold them. And in fact, the British were not - the British thought that Senussi had been basically tricked into fighting for the Ottomans. And there's an element of truth in that. Quite a few of the Senussi leadership, were not at all convinced that it was a good idea to attack Egypt.

**Audience member 8:** Can you speak on any other examples where New Zealand troops engaged with other peoples across Africa, more widely and also serving alongside Egyptian Palestinian troops?

**John Crawford:** So other incidents where they've behaved -

**Audience member 8:** Just other examples of their behaviour in with indigenous people across Africa, Australia, sorry, Africa, Palestine, Egypt.

**John Crawford:** Well in the First World War, of course, the outstanding one is the Surafend massacre in 1918, which is in a league of its own basically in terms of the number of people killed, and the organisation of a war crime by New Zealand personnel. But there are other incidents, I've started to do a bit of work on the suppression of the uprising in Egypt in 1919. And there you do get instances of excessive violence and the ones I've seen so far, generally involve Australian troops. But yes, there was some bad behavior by New Zealand troops there but I have not been a lot of work on that area yet.

**Neill Atkinson:** Thank you everyone for those contributions and I'd just like to thank John and Matthew again for a really fascinating insight into some quite different aspects of both First and Second World War that highlight the interesting and very varied nature of the research that they're doing in their roles. So please join me again in thanking.

[applause]

**Sarah Burgess:** Thanks for listening to this New Zealand History podcast from Manatū Taonga. Don't forget to subscribe and if you're looking for other content about New Zealand history, check out earlier talks in the series. You can find them on your favourite podcast channels. Just search for New Zealand history. Mā te wā.