

# New Zealand goes to war

## The capture of German Samoa

Before the outbreak of war Prime Minister W.F. Massey had made it clear that New Zealand's main contribution would be supplying troops for the major theatre of conflict. After 5 August 1914 preparations were rapidly made. But before New Zealand could commit its troops to Europe, any direct threat in the Pacific region had to be removed. The first objective was to capture German Samoa.

The Germans had established a wireless station in Samoa. On 6 August the British informed the New Zealand government that the capture of German Samoa would be a 'great and urgent Imperial service'. Australian intelligence maintained that this station was protected by a German-officered constabulary of around 80 men and a gunboat. This was no match for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) of 1374 men, under the leadership of Colonel Robert Logan, which achieved its objective without resistance on 29 August. This was the second German territory, after Togoland in Africa, to fall to the Allies in the First World War.

On 23 August Japan entered the war on the side of the Allies, ensuring naval dominance in the Pacific. The Japanese quickly set about capturing German territories north of the Equator.

## Main action

After a delay while an adequate escort was provided, the main body of the NZEF left New Zealand on 16 October 1914. Originally it was intended that it would fight in France. This changed when the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) entered the war on the side of the Central Powers on 5 November.

New Zealand and Australian troops disembarked in Egypt to complete their training. From here they were sent to the [Gallipoli Peninsula](#), Turkey, in April 1915. More than 2700 New Zealanders died during this unsuccessful campaign.

After their evacuation from Gallipoli, New Zealand troops were sent to the Western Front (France and Belgium). The Gallipoli campaign and the birth of the Anzac legend have captured the imagination of generations of New Zealanders. But it is on the [killing fields of the Western Front](#) that most New Zealanders saw action and where most of them died – 12,500 in total.

In addition, a mounted rifles brigade participated in the Sinai–Palestine campaign. A small number of New Zealanders served with British naval and air forces, while others sailed in British and locally owned merchant ships.

New Zealand's wartime strategy was to sustain the NZEF as its main contribution to the war effort while also keeping up the food production that was so vital to the survival of Britain. Reinforcement drafts left New Zealand at regular intervals during the war.

## Conscription

As the war dragged on, the seemingly endless toll in lives and maimed men undermined New Zealand's ability to maintain the numbers required for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Despite public disapproval of those seen as shirkers, 69% of men eligible for military service had not volunteered by 1916. Only with conscription, introduced later that year, could New Zealand maintain its war effort. Some New Zealanders [opposed conscription](#) for a variety of reasons, and some were granted exemption, mainly on religious grounds. Exemption was generally frowned upon. About 2600 conscientious objectors were imprisoned for their beliefs. Some were forcibly sent to the front to break their resolve. Convicted objectors were denied voting rights for 10 years and barred from working for central or local government.