

**THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY
LEGACY:
CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALANDERS'
VIEWS OF THEIR COUNTRY'S
ENGAGEMENT IN THE FIRST WORLD
WAR**

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Abstract

The statistics of New Zealand's World War One participation are shocking - but how do people interpret and make meaning of the appalling reality they represent? How do people understand and come to terms with the official narratives and commemorations which seek to explain them? Using comments from interviews with 35 New Zealanders, conducted one hundred years after the Gallipoli campaign, this paper attempts to address these questions by laying out some of the multitudinous and differing ways in which contemporary New Zealanders construe and reflect on their country's World War One participation.

As a dominion of the British Empire, New Zealand entered the Great War alongside Britain on 4 August 1914. The first troops were sent overseas in October, setting in motion a trend which would see New Zealand contribute more than 100,000 men - of a population of less than one million - to overseas duty over the course of the four-year conflict.¹ These troops suffered high casualty rates throughout the war, including at Gallipoli and on the Western Front.² These figures carry weight; but, one hundred years after the conflict, how do people interpret and make meaning of the appalling reality they represent? Similarly, how do people understand and come to terms with the official narratives and commemorations which seek to explain this reality?

This article attempts to address these questions by analysing a series of interviews carried out with New Zealanders in 2015. Conducted within the remit of the international research project “ANZAC Remembered,” the interviews focussed primarily on participants’ feelings about ANZAC Day, held annually on 25 April. Originally developed to commemorate the 1915-16 Gallipoli campaign of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs), the meaning of ANZAC Day has changed over time, becoming broader in its mandate to encompass the First World War generally, and all preceding and subsequent wars and military

¹ Peter Slade, “Gallipoli thanatourism: The meaning of ANZAC,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 30(4), (2003), pp. 779-794, pp. 782-784.

² In *Bloody Gallipoli*, Richard Stowers suggested that 2779 New Zealand soldiers died and that 5212 were wounded throughout the Gallipoli campaign, making a total of 7991 casualties. Richard Stowers, *Bloody Gallipoli: The New Zealanders’ story*, Auckland: David Bateman, 2005.

operations involving Australian and New Zealand troops. Key tropes of the ANZAC Day narrative are commemoration of the nation's conflicts, soldiers and war dead; the idea of sacrifice for one's country and for 'freedom;' the bond forged between Australia and New Zealand via the ANZAC soldiering tradition; the camaraderie and personality traits of ANZAC soldiers; and the centrality of the First World War to the countries' national development.³

When reflecting on their experiences of ANZAC Day ceremonies and their opinions on its narrative, interviewees naturally talked of the events one hundred years ago which engendered the commemoration - demonstrating the linkages which ritual can create between the past and the present, and between the present and the future⁴ - and it is these comments on the First World War which form the basis of this article. Interviewees' opinions ranged from seemingly unquestioning belief through to outright criticism. Sceptical interviewees usually tempered their criticism by remarking that the First World War era was 'a different time.' They also took care to emphasise that their criticism was not directed at soldiers, signalling that although they were comfortable challenging other elements of the ANZAC narrative, the men who fought were 'off limits.' In trying to challenge the ANZAC narrative, these interviewees were ironically obliged to use the language of war commemoration, indicating the extent to

³ Among the works investigating this narrative are: Graham Seal, *Inventing ANZAC: The digger and national mythology*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004; Alistair Thomson, 'The ANZAC legend: Exploring national myth and memory in Australia,' *The myths we live by*, 1990, pp. 73-82.

⁴ David I. Kertzer, *Rituals, politics and power*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 9.

which this “high diction”⁵ is central to contemporary understandings of war and its commemoration.

Thoughts on New Zealand’s First World War past were shared not only by interviewees involved in veterans’ or heritage groups, or by those who professed to an interest in (military) history, but by all interviewees, including people for whom the issues were largely unfamiliar. Many interviewees thus drew not on research and historical fact to support their particular readings of New Zealand’s wartime engagement and ANZAC Day as the commemoration of this engagement, but rather selected as ‘evidence’ elements of both the past and the official ANZAC narrative. There are several possible explanations for the interviewees’ tendency to place greater importance on expressing opinions rather than historical accuracy. Firstly, the tendency may simply suggest that individuals were interested in the project and wanted to take the opportunity to formulate and give voice to their views. On a more profound level the tendency may suggest, secondly, that New Zealanders in 2015 felt *entitled* to discuss these issues. This sense of entitlement has potentially resulted from the collective, national nature of the ANZAC Day narrative which purports to encompass all new Zealanders (an aspect to which several interviewees explicitly

⁵ ‘High diction’ refers to the language adopted by the majority of official memory-makers in the aftermath of World War One, seeking to construct some sort of justification for the loss of life through acclamatory terminology. Words such as ‘courage,’ ‘bravery,’ ‘hero,’ martyr,’ and ‘camaraderie’ are all part of this semantic group. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 21-23. Fussell was himself a veteran of World War Two.

objected). Thirdly, it is possible that the ANZAC Day narrative - which is more concerned with telling a particular, selective story than presenting the detailed facts - has influenced the ways in which people think and talk of ANZAC Day. The contemporary era itself may also have encouraged this tendency, particularly the emphasis in commemorative practices on victims, and the reality of major global crises in 2015.

Having established the varying views expressed by the interviewees about their country's participation in the Great War, their recognition of the differences between contemporary attitudes and perspectives and those of one hundred years ago, and especially their explicit questioning of standard commemorative narratives, this article demonstrates that neither the First World War, nor ANZAC Day as its official moment of commemoration, are viewed uniformly by New Zealanders. Rather, the interviewees' reflections highlight that individuals can support, challenge or reject officialised narratives. In this way, the article supports scholarship that underscores the plurality of *memories* in place of a singular collective memory of the past, and provides insight into how these memories play out when enacted by individuals with no lived experience of the events they are 'remembering.'

Existing Research

The wartime experiences of ANZAC soldiers have been well studied but comparatively little scholarship has focused on the commemoration of ANZAC Day. In Australia, eminent historian Ken

Inglis has conducted research on ANZAC Day,⁶ and the majority of recent analyses of the event have tended to focus primarily on its incredible revitalisation from the 1980s, when it seemed to be out of public favour, to the large-scale events of today.⁷ One theory for this revival, advanced by Christina Twomey, purported that the contemporary profile of ANZAC Day was due to increasing recognition of and interest in the trauma and victimhood which result from war. Twomey opined that trauma provided a construct with which everyone could identify, in contrast to the traditional commemorative language of glory and sacrifice.⁸ Other theories support this argument, including Jay Winter's assertion that victims are at the centre of the contemporary interest in memory.⁹ Scholars have also challenged the powerful myths of war commemoration in Australia, including Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds' controversial *What's wrong with ANZAC? The militarisation of Australian history* (2010).¹⁰ In addition to work specifically devoted to ANZAC Day,

⁶ Kenneth S. Inglis, "The Anzac Tradition," *Meanjin Quarterly* 24(1) (1965), pp. 25-44; John Lack (ed.), *Anzac remembered: Selected writings of K.S. Inglis*, The University of Melbourne: Melbourne, 1998.

⁷ Bruce Scates, Rae Frances, Keir Reeves, *et al.*, "ANZAC Day at home and abroad: Towards a history of Australia's national day," *History Compass* 10(7) (2012), pp. 523-536, p. 528.

⁸ Christina Twomey, "Trauma and the reinvigoration of ANZAC," *History Australia*, 10(3) (2013), pp. 85-108, p. 107.

⁹ Jay Winter, *Remembering war: The Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 1.

¹⁰ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *What's wrong with ANZAC? The militarisation of Australian history*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010.

scholars have paid attention in Australia to the broader elements of war commemoration and memory.¹¹

In New Zealand, scholars have tended to analyse ANZAC commemoration and mythology from within certain frameworks including temporal, with particular focus on the post-First and Second World War eras,¹² and comparative.¹³ War memory, and memorialisation in general, have also been important themes for scholarly analysis. Among other topics, researchers have considered

¹¹ For example: Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Melbourne University Press, 1998; Pat Jalland, *Changing ways of Death in twentieth-century Australia: War, medicine and the funeral business*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006; Bruce Scates, "In Gallipoli's Shadow: Pilgrimage, memory, mourning and the Great War," *Australian Historical Studies* 33(119) (2002), pp. 1-21; Scates, "Manufacturing memory at Gallipoli." In: Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig (eds.), *War memory and popular culture: Essays on modes of remembrance and commemoration*, Jefferson, N.C. and London: McFarland and Co. Inc. Pub., 2009, pp. 57-75; Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the battlefields of the Great War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the legend*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; Stuart Ward and Mark McKenna, "'It was really moving, mate': The Gallipoli Pilgrimage and Sentimental Nationalism in Australia," *Australian Historical Studies* 38(129), 2007; Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*, Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2007.

¹² For example: Scott Worthy, 'A debt of honour: New Zealanders' first ANZAC Days,' *New Zealand Journal of History* 36(2), (2002), pp. 185-200; Stephen J. Clarke, *The one day of the year: ANZAC day in Aotearoa/New Zealand 1946-1990*, unpublished Master of Arts, University of Otago, 1994; Helen Robinson, 'Lest we forget? The fading of New Zealand war commemorations 1946-1966,' *New Zealand Journal of History* 44(1), (2010), pp. 76-91.

¹³ For example, Davis considered ANZAC Day commemoration in New Zealand, Australia and Turkey: George Frederick Davis, *Anzac Day meanings and memories: New Zealand, Australian and Turkish perspectives on a day of commemoration in the twentieth century*, unpublished PhD, University of Otago, 2008, Another PhD thesis considered Waitangi and ANZAC Days in New Zealand in comparison with Twelfth of July and Remembrance Sunday in Northern Ireland: Helen Alexandra Robinson, *Remembering the Past, Thinking of the Present: Historic Commemorations in New Zealand and Northern Ireland, 1940-1990*, unpublished PhD, University of Auckland, 2009.

the role of war memorials in the New Zealand landscape¹⁴ and have used oral histories to capture the opinions of former servicemen and -women of the First World War (and subsequent wars). To this end, a number of audio collections are stored at libraries and other institutions such as at the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa for the public to access. Released in 2015, *Remembering Gallipoli: Interviews with New Zealand Gallipoli veterans* constitutes an example of scholarly engagement with such interviews, with veterans' interviews from the 1980s preceded by an introduction by historians of New Zealand's World War One.¹⁵

This article also relies on material obtained through interviews. Instead of highlighting the perspectives of actors of New Zealand's wars, however, it illustrates the thoughts of 'ordinary New Zealanders' reflecting on their country's military engagements and the official narratives surrounding these engagements. In this way, the article contributes not only to understandings of New Zealand (military) history but also to memory scholarship, particularly in terms of considering how people 'remember' and relate to key events in their national past one hundred years on. These insights are important as little research has considered the views of 'ordinary people' towards ANZAC Day; in fact, scholars of national commemorations have in general been more concerned with the

¹⁴ For example: Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials*, Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1990.

¹⁵ Christopher Pugsley and Charles Ferrall, *Remembering Gallipoli: Interviews with New Zealand Gallipoli veterans*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2015.

symbols and rituals of national mythmaking than with the people who attend these events.¹⁶

The “ANZAC Remembered” research project, from which this article was derived, was developed with the intention of capturing people’s opinions on ANZAC Day (and related themes) in order to help make sense of how this particular national commemoration is interpreted beyond officialised discourse and ritual. Looking beyond the official narrative is important because people continually (re)interpret commemoration.¹⁷ Especially important in this regard is the resurgence of ANZAC Day over the last few decades, with analysis of contemporary opinions potentially uncovering some of the reasons for the event’s revival. Thus, in addition to contributing to understandings of ‘memory’ and the role of commemoration in forming this ‘memory,’ this article - and the “ANZAC Remembered” project more widely - also contribute to our knowledge of contemporary societies and the people who live within them.

Methodology

This article takes as its primary source base interviews conducted with New Zealanders as part of the “ANZAC Remembered” project headed by Monash University in Australia, which aims to gain a better understanding of the contemporary attitudes of Australians and New Zealanders towards ANZAC Day.¹⁸ While the focus of the

¹⁶ Jon E. Fox, Consuming the nation: Holidays, sports, and the production of collective belonging,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29(2) (2006), pp. 217-236, p. 221.

¹⁷ Kertzer, *Rituals, politics and power*, p. 12.

¹⁸ Scates *et al.*, “ANZAC Day at home and abroad,” p. 526

research, and thus the interviews, was ANZAC Day, the content and direction were largely interviewee-driven. As a result, participants broached a range of subjects related to war, its commemoration, family history and genealogy, commemorative practices and preferences, the role of media and education in remembrance, peace and pacifism. Reflections on the First World War, including New Zealand's and New Zealanders' participation in it, were also freely given, although not specifically solicited.

Interview participants were recruited following their completion of a survey on ANZAC Day, which invited people to self-nominate for an interview. Every survey respondent who indicated potential interest in an interview was contacted. The surveys were distributed throughout 2014-2015 - in other words, at the start of the centenary of the First World War and over the centenary of the landings at Gallipoli - through groups with anticipated interest in the topic such as veterans' and heritage organisations, but also through churches, cafes and other public venues, and on the websites of organisations with national reach such as the Human Rights Commission and Statistics New Zealand. A newspaper article on the project also incorporated a link to the online survey.¹⁹ Such methods aimed at promoting the survey as widely as possible and encouraging broad participation.

¹⁹ Olivia Wannan, 'Research looks at ANZAC Day in post-earthquake Christchurch,' *Stuff*, 26 April 2015, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/science/67934070/research-looks-at-anzac-day-in-postquake-christchurch> accessed 11 June 2016.

The results indicate that this methodology was successful in soliciting participation from people with vastly different perspectives on, and levels of interest in, ANZAC Day. While some respondents were enthusiastic and attended ANZAC Day commemoration services regularly, others refused to attend because they saw it as glorifying war. Further, several respondents admitted to feelings of apathy about the event. As with any research reliant on respondent self-selection, participants presumably completed the surveys because they valued the opportunity to express their opinions on ANZAC Day and war commemoration. This motivation resulted not only in the array of perspectives, but also in the depth of insight and reflection perceptible in their commentary.

At the end of the two-year survey distribution period, 113 surveys had been completed.²⁰ Interviews were subsequently held with 31 survey respondents, as well as with an additional four people who did not complete surveys (including one man who participated in an interview with his wife, who had responded to the survey), making a total of 35 interviewees. The interviews lasted between 25 and 100 minutes, averaging 40-45 minutes, and were held between February and December 2015. The interviews were conducted by the author of this article, and were transcribed as part of the process.

²⁰ Of the 113 survey respondents, 45 were women and 51 were men, with 17 people not specifying this information. In terms of age, two respondents indicated their age as 20 or under, 28 respondents were aged 21-30, 19 respondents were aged 31-45, 27 respondents were aged 46-60, 28 respondents were aged 61-75, six respondents were aged 76-90 and one respondent was over 90 years old. Two respondents did not provide this information. Sixteen of the 113 respondents had had some military service.

The majority of interviewees (31 out of 35) lived in Christchurch, New Zealand's second-largest city.²¹ This sample bias stems in part from the fact that the researcher was also based there, and in part from the subsidiary research aim to determine whether people's opinions of ANZAC Day had changed following the devastating earthquake sequence which hit the city in 2010-2011. The other four interviewees lived in different parts of New Zealand. Beyond this geographical bias, no particular demographic trends were discernible amongst the interviewees, with a fairly even spread of gender and age. Four of the 35 interviewees had completed some military service.²² In terms of overarching perspectives on ANZAC Day, of the 35 interviewees, seven could be described as enthusiastic, 10 were moderately interested, nine were ambivalent, one person was quite against the event and four people were very against it, and the remaining four people professed to apathy. The versatility discernible among the interviewee cohort - both in terms of demographics and in terms of level of interest in ANZAC Day and New Zealand's military past - is important. It demonstrates that not only people interested in history or the military participated in the research, but rather that New

²¹ For statistics on the populations of New Zealand cities, see Statistics New Zealand, '2013 Census usually resident population counts,' 15 October 2013, http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/census_counts/2013CensusUsuallyResidentPopulationCounts_HOTP2013Census/Commentary.aspx accessed 6 August 2016.

²² Twenty interviewees were women and 15 were men. In terms of age, one interviewee indicated their age as 20 or under, six interviewees were aged 21-30, four interviewees were aged 31-45, 10 interviewees were aged 46-60, 12 interviewees were aged 61-75, one interviewee was aged 76-89 and one interviewee was over 90 years old. Four interviewees had had some military service.

Zealanders of all kinds felt inclined to share their views on the subject of ANZAC Day, and also probably accounts in part for the fact that interviewees seemed to place higher value on voicing their opinions than on ensuring historical accuracy in their comments.

Interviewees' Views of New Zealand's Participation in the First World War

In their interviews, participants addressed several elements of New Zealand's experience of the First World War. The broadest theme was the war's outbreak. Three people brought up this topic, all of whom were intensely critical of the circumstances which led to the conflict. One young interviewee, who disliked ANZAC Day because she perceived of it as lauding the military, explained that, "It seems to me that the war wasn't really fought about anything; it was just a military race and then suddenly there was a spark to the powder keg and it was all on."²³ Directly after this statement, the interviewee reiterated a point she had already made apparent in her interview: the purpose of ANZAC Day, she believed, should be to remind us of the human costs of war. The interviewee's insistence on this idea - she returned to it numerous times throughout the discussion - suggests that, for her, remembering the causes of the conflict were significantly less important than remembering the horrors which followed. In her perception, the fact that the war was fought for no discernible reason merely served as further justification for focussing the

²³ Interviewee #4, female, 31-45 years, no military service. Interviewed 28 January 2015.

commemoration on loss. This example demonstrates how interviewees appropriated elements of the history of the First World War which they saw as reinforcing and strengthening their arguments about ANZAC Day, but also that this appropriated ‘history’ could consist of strongly-felt opinions rather than ideas which had been developed in great detail.

While the interviewee cited above dismissed the First World War as not being fought over “anything,” other interviewees pinpointed power and money as key factors in motivating nations to war. One interviewee, who was highly sceptical of war commemorations and had only attended ANZAC Day services for research purposes on the suggestion of her Anthropology professor (she was taking a paper on national commemorations), recounted how, at a dawn service, “I bumped into a Scotsman who was hanging around the fringes - like I was, pretty much - and he said, “Oh war is just about power and economics and all that sort of thing” and I thought, well yes, I totally agree, but I don’t think people thought... People [at the time] never realised it was like that.”²⁴ This comment illustrates how interviewees were able to express intense criticism of the war and the situation which engendered it, but still try to understand the reasons for New Zealand’s involvement by acknowledging the differences in time.

Similarly unable to comprehend the reasons for the First World War, another interviewee argued:

²⁴ Interviewee #32, female, 61-75 years, no military service. Interviewed 9 October 2015.

I genuinely think they [the soldiers] should be honoured for what they did even though I think the whole militaristic thing that happened at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century was all around grabs for power and money and not exactly... It was all just a big great game stuff around grabs for power. The reasons for war weren't that great.²⁵

This comment reflects the interviewee's self-professed highly conflicted feelings about ANZAC Day: while he wholeheartedly believed soldiers should be remembered for the hardship and tragedy they had endured, he had entrenched concerns that remembrance of war can - and does - glorify war and perpetuate distrust and violence amongst individuals and within society. In an attempt to clarify his standpoint, he continued: "Regardless of how misguided it [the war] was or how misguided *I* think it was, they're [the soldiers of the First World War] from a different time. They did what they thought had to be done, regardless of what the actual outcome is."²⁶ In this way, despite not being able to comprehend their involvement, the interviewee attempted to exonerate the soldiers for it.

The comments from these interviewees point to another theme prevalent in the interviews: several people noted that they were talking about an event which occurred one hundred years ago, and that circumstances were very different at that time compared to today. Implicit in their commentary is the feeling that it is difficult - and perhaps even morally questionable - to judge by contemporary norms and from within contemporary contexts, and with the benefit of

²⁵ Interviewee #28, male, 45-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 8 July 2015.

²⁶ Interviewee #28.

hindsight, the decisions and actions of people from the past. Further, embedded in some of the comments is the feeling that, because the World War One era is so alien to our contemporary reality, we cannot truly comprehend the decisions and actions which were taken. In other words, interviewees used this reasoning both to excuse the actions of the past and to distance themselves from these actions. The idea is also important in terms of the argument that interviewees were more concerned with airing their opinions than with historical accuracy - people often remarked that the First World War era was 'a different time' without necessarily explaining why - suggesting perhaps that interviewees felt that contextual details were less important than their recognition of the issue.

One subject in which interviewees commonly remarked upon the difference between circumstances and attitudes of today and those of 1914 was in speculating on the reasons for New Zealand's involvement in the war. Two people talked about the notion of Britain as the 'mother country' inspiring New Zealand's engagement, but simultaneously recognised that times have changed and that this reason would no longer hold much sway. As one interviewee commented "It was important to fight for England and country and all that stuff then - whereas maybe, on reflection, it's not now."²⁷ The idea of a special relationship between England and colonies was also stressed by another interviewee. Again, though, she noted that this relationship has irrevocably changed: "Australia and New Zealand,

²⁷ Interviewee #10, male, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 12 February 2015.

especially one hundred years ago, had very, very close ties to England as the mother country - so if she was threatened, then they wanted to defend her. Whereas I think if it happened today, people may feel completely differently about it.”²⁸

Related to people’s comments on New Zealand’s participation in World War One was the feeling - expressed by quite a large number of interviewees - that it was ‘not New Zealand’s war’ to be getting involved in, anyway. The clearest example of this discourse was expressed by one of the older interviewees in the cohort who was vehemently hostile to ANZAC Day because he considered it a vehicle for glorifying war. In making his case, he referenced the mother country argument, but did so in order to stress how little relevance the war had to New Zealand. He continued on to voice similar feelings about the Second World War, concluding that “Until Japan became a threat to New Zealand, it wasn’t really, I don’t think, our war.”²⁹ Military engagement would perhaps be justified, for this interviewee, if New Zealand’s national sovereignty were threatened, but not necessarily in defence of others’.

The idea that the First World War was ‘not New Zealand’s war’ was also expressed by two interviewees in reference to Turkish commemorations of Gallipoli. One interviewee cited a recent ANZAC Day speech by a Turkish official, who stressed his

²⁸ Interviewee #25, female, 61-75 years, no military service. Interviewed 15 June 2015.

²⁹ Interviewee #21, male, 61-75 years, no military service. Interviewed 9 April 2015.

compatriots' puzzlement at the distance which New Zealanders had come to fight a war which was 'not theirs.' The interviewee paraphrased the speech as a fictional conversation between curious Turks and the official: "'What were they doing? Where do they come from, these New Zealanders?' 'Well, they come from away in the Pacific Ocean.' 'What are they doing over here fighting a war for Britain?'"³⁰ For another interviewee, this same scenario was critical to Tukey's acceptance and embrace of fallen enemy troops:

They do say that the Australians and the New Zealanders who died are now sons of Turkey and will be looked after like the children of Turkey. I think they realised that this war was kind of pointless for all concerned. [...] It was all young men dying for a war that really didn't concern them. [...] I do think that a lot of wars we got involved in were a waste of New Zealand life because we could have said, "Excuse me, this is really not our war."³¹

As demonstrated by such comments, the New Zealanders interviewed in relation to their feelings about ANZAC Day believed neither that the grounds for the First World War were legitimate nor that New Zealand should really have been involved. The interviewees noted, however, that the circumstances which both produced the conflict and incited New Zealand to send troops in aid of Britain were very different to today. Interviewees were able to rationalise the past through recognising that they were analysing the situation through a contemporary lens, seemingly trying to excuse decisions which, from interviewees' perspectives, were difficult to comprehend. There are

³⁰ Interviewee #32.

³¹ Interviewee #33, female, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 16 October 2015.

several possible explanations why interviewees softened their criticism of New Zealand's First World War participation, including a recognition that the past cannot be changed and that directly challenging the issue of wartime participation would simultaneously challenge the role of New Zealand's First World War soldiers; interviewees generally made it very clear that they did not want to apportion blame to the soldiers.

Deliberation on whether or not the First World War was 'New Zealand's war' prompted interviewees to reflect on the reasons why individual New Zealanders engaged in the conflict. One theory put forward revolved around the idea of authority, particularly obedience to the government. For the two people who broached this subject, however, there was an explicit recognition that unquestioning conformity would be out-of-place today. In broad terms:

Young people today question the State's motives when they go to war; they say look, no, you're wrong, we don't need to be in Iraq, we don't need to go and fight ISIS, no, that's a war for self-determination... You do not go along blindly. But one hundred years ago, you did what the government told you to do.³²

Echoing this sentiment, but speaking from a personal point of view about his young son's aspirations to join the army and be a peacekeeper, another interviewee explained:

He sees no greater cause than to serve your country doing that. But he's also very aware that governments could instruct him to go to war on the basis of arguments that he couldn't support, so he also recognises the need to be able to opt out or be a

³² Interviewee #13, male, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 13 February 2015.

conscientious objector as well and resign if you can't... So he doesn't believe really in blind obedience, which is going to be interesting when he goes to the army, if he gets that far!³³

These comments indicate that the interviewees believed that men who enlisted for the First World War did so, at least in part, because they were asked (or told) to by their government. This understanding of history is, in fact, not wholly accurate; governmental pressure was only one of many factors which may have resulted in enlistment. What is important in terms of this analysis, however, is the fact that the interviewees drew on the issue of governmental pressure as 'evidence' to support their points of view; in this instance, seeking to emphasise the differences in attitudes in terms of contemporary and past obedience to authority.

Interviewees presented varying opinions on the question of whether, if men enlisted at the request of their government, they engaged with the reasons for which the war was being fought. On the one hand, people expressed sentiments like, "Those guys thought they were doing the right thing and were going there for a good time and 'We want to defeat the Hun' or whatever it was they thought they were going to defeat,"³⁴ which suggest that some contemporary observers believed that the soldiers were aware both of the factors driving the conflict and of their role in it. More pessimistically, on the other hand, other comments imply that interviewees did not believe

³³ Interviewee #2, male, 61-75 years, no military service. Interviewed 16 January 2015.

³⁴ Interviewee #35, female, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 15 December 2015.

that soldiers actually engaged with the conflict beyond their own immediate concerns. For example, one man explained, “I’d like to think in most cases they knew what they were fighting for, but the reality is, some of them were just there because there was a chance for a fight, and others didn’t have a clue. They were just handed something that said, ‘Pointy end away from you.’”³⁵

While the idea of obedience was not widely expressed as a reason why soldiers enlisted, several interviewees made mention of the scenario which has been immortalised in New Zealand’s Great War narrative: that of fresh-faced young men eager to set off on the adventure of a lifetime. For one woman, the narrative was actually true on a personal level; as she explained, “I had this great uncle who left New Zealand at 16 to go to World War One. I knew him quite well and that’s what they thought: they were going on an adventure and helping people”³⁶ Each of the five interviewees who mentioned “adventure,” however, to some extent qualified it by contrasting soldiers’ beliefs with the reality of war; stressing, in other words, that men who enlisted did not know what to expect. The tragic situation was frankly highlighted thus: “I know that most boys would have gone off to war with this kind of totally different image to what it was, and a week later found themselves in the bloody trenches with all the

³⁵ Interviewee #16, male, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 15 February 2015.

³⁶ Interviewee #32.

awful, awful conditions, missing their families like hell, their families never knowing if they were dead or alive.”³⁷

Interviewees pondered the factors which prompted the disjuncture between soldiers’ beliefs and reality. One young interviewee noted that the idea of war as a great adventure “was certainly how it was sold to them if you look at all the marketing material,”³⁸ referring to propaganda posters extolling warfare and condemning those who did not play their part. For another interviewee, the soldiers were “manipulated” (although she did not specify by whom) into thinking everything would be fine:

When I see the footage of the young men going to war, playing cards on the decks of boats, smoking... These poor young men, some of them boys... They thought they were off to have an adventure, some kind of boys’ own adventure, that they would kill a few people and come home in six months. That just makes me really sad and makes me really angry that they were so manipulated, in a way.³⁹

The majority of commentary portrayed the divide between soldiers’ beliefs and the reality of war as ghastly and unfortunate. Yet the following quote, from a young male interviewee, shows that the idea of warfare can continue to exert hold over some people, even when they are aware of its atrocities. The interviewee recounted that during an ANZAC Day minute of silence, “I remember thinking, ‘Would I want to go to war?’ A lot of young men jumped at the chance to go to

³⁷ Interviewee #4.

³⁸ Interviewee #31, male, 21-30 years, no military service. Interviewed 13 August 2015.

³⁹ Interviewee #33.

war, not really knowing what they were getting into. Yes, it has run through my head.”⁴⁰

The interviewee’s confession that going to war holds at least some appeal emphasises the fact that there are countless interpretations of the legacy of World War One and New Zealand’s part in it. In the words of one interviewee, although

mainstream New Zealand gives that picture of all the boys going off and smiling and waving goodbye and yes, mum had a bit of a cry and all that kind of stuff, in actual fact, the reality as more complex and political than that. [...] New Zealand wasn’t all just flag waving and “Yes we support Britain.”⁴¹

These complexities - and the nuances of opinion which they engender - need to be recognised. They indicate that countless personal readings of history exist alongside - and indeed, within and prompted by - official state-sponsored narratives of the past.

One powerful and persistent element of the myth of the New Zealand war story (and British Empire war story, more broadly) is the idea of colonial troops being poorly treated and directed by their British commanders. This issue was raised by a few interviewees, for example in relation to the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign:

You just had to go and stand on the top of Chunuk Bair and you could see the Dardanelles down there and you think, well why did you do this? Why did you come here? This is just completely potty. And to me there’s an element of anti-Britishness in it because we went in

⁴⁰ Interviewee #9, male, 21-30 years, no military service. Interviewed 5 February 2015.

⁴¹ Interviewee #35.

and served the Brits and they cocked it up and we were the ones caught in it.⁴²

The most emphatic interviewee to contrast New Zealand and British military practices was an ex-serviceman who described ANZAC Day as the occasion to remember “the lions led by donkeys,”⁴³ drawing on one of the war’s enduring centre-periphery stereotypes. In contrast, another ex-serviceman deliberately sought to challenge this myth, stressing the disconnect between “historical facts and people’s understanding of what did happen.” He emphasised that more British servicemen were killed at Gallipoli than New Zealanders and Australians combined, continuing on to state: “I do find New Zealand is generally ill informed about ANZAC. [...] I think there’s no question there were probably command control and leadership and governance mistakes made. [...] I’m not saying we shouldn’t recognise it but it’s got to be put in context.”⁴⁴

Just as this interviewee took the opportunity to introduce some nuance to the narrative of New Zealand’s war participation, so too did others. One element of the myth which was challenged was soldiers’ bravery, which two interviewees mentioned in relation to the content of ANZAC Day speeches. While not wanting to belittle the soldiers’ experience, one interviewee explained,

⁴² Interviewee #35.

⁴³ Interviewee #20, male, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 25 February 2015.

⁴⁴ Interviewee #15, male, 46-60 years, military service. Interviewed 13 February 2015.

It's true that people were brave and that there's a kind of impressiveness about their bravery, but from what I know of a lot of those situations, I think the fact that they were forced to be brave in that way is not good. [...] That doesn't strike me as something to celebrate.⁴⁵

Similarly, the other interviewee admitted that she “struggled slightly” with commemorative references extolling this trait because she believed that it was “probably ignorance rather than bravery”⁴⁶ which motivated soldiers.

The opposite of bravery - fear - was also mentioned, by another interviewee who regretted the lack of recognition in commemorative discourse of soldiers' fear. Underscoring the role of fear, he believed, could highlight the similarities between troops on both sides of the conflict: “I kind of wish there was a bit more on the other side fighting, because I think they were probably equally as scared and forced to do stuff that they didn't want to do.”⁴⁷ Inherent to such comments is a hope that if ANZAC Day speeches focussed more on soldiers' fear, or less on soldier's bravery, they might lend themselves to greater promotion of anti-war messaging. This comment constitutes a direct critique of the official narrative of New Zealand's war participation, which tends to focus on more positive elements of the soldiering experience.

⁴⁵ Interviewee #3, female, 21-30 years, no military service. Interviewed 21 January 2015.

⁴⁶ Interviewee #35.

⁴⁷ Interviewee #10, male, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 12 February 2015.

One ex-serviceman presented a different view, simultaneously criticising ANZAC Day speeches as “tend[ing] to glorify war” and lauding soldiers’ bravery. He emphatically stated, “From my experience, there’s no glory in war. [...] It takes a brave man or woman to stand up for their country because you are willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice; you might get a medal or two to wear but there’s certainly no glory in it and people need to realise it.”⁴⁸ For this interviewee, then, the two phenomena need not be incompatible; in fact, seen in this way, paying tribute to bravery can actually help to underscore the lack of glory in war. Although this interviewee expressed a different opinion to the non-military interviewee cited above, his perspective also directly challenges New Zealand’s official First World War narrative. For this interviewee, the commemoration needs to move away from notions of glory and focus on the soldiers’ bravery - and on the scary realities that necessitated this bravery. Despite his critique of the commemoration, however, the ex-serviceman nonetheless used its language -the trope of “the ultimate sacrifice” - showing the pervasiveness of the language of the official narrative to contemporary perceptions even when people seek to redress this understanding.

One other key commemorative message with which interviewees grappled was the idea that soldiers died for New Zealand’s freedom and way of life. This idea was raised by seven people, four of whom appeared to support it and three of whom did not. Only one of these

⁴⁸ Interviewee #26, male, 46-60 years, military service. Interviewed 26 June 2015.

seven interviewees detailed what this ‘freedom’ entailed, describing New Zealand’s ability to accept refugees, themselves victims of and escaping from war. The other interviewees did not explain their understandings of ‘freedom,’ a fact which further demonstrates the pervasiveness of the language of the official war narrative amongst contemporary New Zealanders, even among those who seek to question it: the interviewees may have pronounced the word with sarcasm, but they were still obliged to use it to get their message across.

Amongst the four supporters of the idea of ‘dying for freedom’ were two members of the Returned Services Association (one ex-serviceman and one civilian member). The civilian member, whose father was a returned soldier and whose mother had been in the Women’s Army Corps, confidently stated that

I have a lot of respect for those people that went away and I know that they sacrificed a lot. [...] And of course there was a lot more pressure for those people to go away and fight - they didn’t always have a choice, as such - and I think it really does make you appreciate our freedom. [...] What we’ve got today is because of those people.⁴⁹

Similar sentiments were expressed by the ex-serviceman, who attributed the country’s freedoms to multiple generations of New Zealand soldiers: “I enjoy freedoms in my life now because of the people that went before me and I know the generations behind me are

⁴⁹ Interviewee #24, female, 46-60 years, no military service. Interviewed 15 June 2015.

sharing benefits of me and what I've done overseas; not that I'm proud of that, but that's the way I see it."⁵⁰

The honesty of this self-effacing admission was not evident in the responses of the other two interviewees who supported the concept of New Zealand freedom being won on the battlefield. Rather, their commentary iterated phrases standard in war commemoration. One of the interviewees declared, "I'm proud to be a New Zealander" in light of the fact the soldiers had died "trying to defend [my] country."⁵¹ The other interviewee ran through a 'shopping list' of commemorative tropes when considering the issue of the legacy of New Zealand troops fighting in World War One: "I'm pretty sure even as a child I understood the men had gone to war and fought for our country and lost their lives and paid the ultimate price and that kind of stuff and it was pretty important and all of that."⁵² While listing off the commonly-cited tropes of war commemoration appears to lend weight to the interviewee's argument in favour of the importance of New Zealand's engagement, the casual language in which the list is couched suggests that the tropes are very familiar to the person reciting them - and thus points, perhaps, to a lack of critical thinking around the issue.

Although some interviewees appeared to have accepted the discourse of ANZAC Day commemoration, others consciously

⁵⁰ Interviewee #26.

⁵¹ Interviewee #29, female, 31-45 years, no military service. Interviewed 15 July 2015

⁵² Interviewee #17, female, 21-30 years, no military service. Interviewed 18 February 2015.

critiqued it. This finding echoes scholarly analyses of other commemorative events which have shown that some people tend to accept official narratives of the past while others question or contest them.⁵³ Directly challenging the narrative, one interviewee claimed that, “[It] is not the case [but] there are still people who are saying they [New Zealand soldiers] needed to take part in the wars because of protecting our freedom.”⁵⁴ A more interrogative opinion was put forward by another interviewee:

I think a popular notion is being grateful that those people fought so that we now live in peace. I often kind of think about that and I’m not really sure if that’s true, stuff like that. [...] So while I think it’s important to remember - I think my grandparents would rather I was there [at the ANZAC Day Dawn Service] than asleep in bed or whatever - a lot of the glorious narratives that get sprung up around it are quite questionable.⁵⁵

Such commentary indicates critical engagement with the narrative of New Zealand’s World War One participation, in which individuals have questioned the truth of the messages which get promoted through commemoration. Yet questioning is not the only approach; one interviewee dismissed outright the message that New Zealand troops died for freedom, making clear his hostility:

We somehow are not loser or victors, we were defenders - so we were defenders of personal liberty; we were defenders of what we have. [...] The folly they died for is - we like to call it liberty - but at the end of the day it was a young kid that died. He didn’t

⁵³ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public memory, commemoration and patriotism in the twentieth century*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Interviewee #19, female, 61-75 years, no military service. Interviewed 21 February 2015.

⁵⁵ Interviewee #3.

give a hoot as to what he was dying for; he didn't have a choice in the matter. His government, his country, sent him to die.⁵⁶

The bitterness of this comment was unusual among interviewees; people tended to temper their anti-war sentiment either by recognising that the early twentieth century was a different era or by stressing their desire to honour soldiers who had fought.

Yet although the language employed by interviewees was not necessarily forcefully critical, a strong aversion to the nature of the First World War, and warfare in general, was common to all interviews. There are many possible explanations for this anti-war sentiment; however, the context in which the interviews were held - 2015 New Zealand - is probably the most important. Firstly, as Twomey argued, the notion of victimhood and trauma hold more sway today than the traditional commemorative language of glory and sacrifice.⁵⁷ Further, in this digital age, we are exposed to the brutality of past and present warfare on a daily basis through the media. It was apparent during the interviews that global issues of the period, particularly the refugee crisis, the war in Syria and the threat of ISIS, were prominent in people's minds, with interviewees pondering New Zealand's role in these arenas and also the role which war commemoration could and should play in determining New Zealand's course of action.

One final issue on which the interviewees focussed was whether the First World War - and specifically the ANZAC involvement in

⁵⁶ Interviewee #13.

⁵⁷ Twomey, "Trauma and the reinvigoration of ANZAC," p. 107.

the battles at Gallipoli - heralded the “birth” of New Zealand as a nation. This idea of nationhood is central to New Zealand’s official war narrative. It stems in part from New Zealand’s extremely high casualty rate throughout the war, and especially from the high percentage of Australian and New Zealand casualties at Gallipoli,⁵⁸ but also hinges on elements critical to the ANZAC narrative including the notion of the nations’ ‘baptism by fire’ on the First World War battlefields, and the development of a particularly ANZAC ‘personality’ and language at the time which are now deemed inherent to the nations’ cultural heritage.

Interviewees’ comments in relation to the role of the First World War in New Zealand’s national development again demonstrated that people had reflected on the issue and had come away questioning. Believing that the importance of Gallipoli is overstated in official narratives, an ex-serviceman stated: “It [World War One] was probably New Zealand’s point of coming of age. [...] I think a lot of New Zealand culture and language does actually stem back to that particular period of time, but I think we’ve got to be careful that we don’t overstate it, particularly Gallipoli.”⁵⁹ Similarly, another ex-serviceman sought to highlight the continuities of New Zealand’s military engagements in order to put Gallipoli into context:

I know the ANZAC name was formed in ANZAC Cove in Turkey - the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps - but like I said: South Africa, the New Zealand wars, World War Two...

⁵⁸ Slade, “Gallipoli thanatourism,” pp. 783.

⁵⁹ Interviewee #15.

It's the Kiwi spirit. We're always doing that stuff, but ANZAC gave it a name.⁶⁰

For these people, the First World War and Gallipoli, although fundamentally important, constitute only a single chapter in New Zealand's history and should thus be awarded a correspondingly appropriate amount of recognition in comparison to the country's other military engagements.

Much as occurred in Australia during and following the First World War,⁶¹ New Zealand's engagement in the Great War was lauded as responsible for developing specifically Kiwi, or ANZAC, personality traits and characteristics. This situation was alluded to in the ex-serviceman's comment above about "Kiwi spirit," but one young interviewee made the link more explicitly. Reflecting on the contemporary echoes of his country's participation, he mused: "Especially with the younger generation today, there's this kind of ANZAC identity - we're renowned for doing things bigger than what we should be doing in regards to the size of our country."⁶² For this interviewee, the identity of the ANZAC soldiers - their constructed, collaborative identity - has repercussions for today's generations in terms of interpretations of what constitutes a 'New Zealander.' These supposed personality traits are fundamental to the myth of the ANZAC soldier and the narrative which has grown around it.⁶³

⁶⁰ Interviewee #26.

⁶¹ Bart Ziino, "'A lasting gift to his descendants': Family memory and the Great War in Australia," *History and Memory* 22(2) (2010), pp. 125-146, p. 128.

⁶² Interviewee #18, male, 21-30 years, no military service. Interviewed 19 February 2015.

⁶³ Seal, *Inventing ANZAC*, Chapter One.

Myths are central to the belief that the First World War and the Gallipoli battles are central to the birth of New Zealand as a 'nation.' These myths were usually implicitly supported or critiqued by interviewees; however, some people chose to talk directly of the issue. One such interviewee, who has perceived a recent shift in the focus of ANZAC Day ceremonies from war and soldiers' deaths to the First World War as a defining moment in New Zealand nationhood, explained the situation as follows:

[The war was] a key event in the making of New Zealand. That's how it's portrayed, anyway; whether that's actually true in reality, I don't know. It's probably partly true - but I think you can also start cracking lots of legends and myths around that, as well.⁶⁴

Such commentary indicates a critical appraisal of official narratives of war. Another way of interpreting these nationhood narratives is disgust: "People will say that Gallipoli is kind of the moment when New Zealand was established on the world stage as a nation. That strikes me as pretty horrible [...] I don't really see it as a time to be proud of anything."⁶⁵ Such distinctly critical commentary was fairly rare among interviewees, who tended to worry about the potential of war commemoration to glorify war whilst simultaneously underscoring their desire to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers. As evidenced by the varying responses to the issue of dying for freedoms, contemporary New Zealanders hold and express varying views on their country's First World War participation.

⁶⁴ Interviewee #2.

⁶⁵ Interviewee #3.

Discussion and Conclusion

The interviewees' comments on the First World War and New Zealand's participation in it provide an insight into the views which people hold today of the events of one hundred years ago, and establish that these views vary widely. While some comments seemed to support the standard tropes and discourses of war commemoration, it was rare that interviewees discussed such ideas without qualifying their reasons or personal feelings on the subject. Only seven of 35 interviewees appeared unquestioningly sympathetic to ANZAC Day and war commemoration, and to the events which engendered such commemoration. Conversely, only four people were exclusively critical of World War One and its consequences, although anti-war sentiment was prevalent in every interview. Instead, most interviewees were openly ambivalent or conflicted, actively challenging both officialised interpretations of war and its commemoration, and their own biases and uncertainties. Important in terms of this analysis of contemporary New Zealanders' perspectives on ANZAC Day and their country's First World War engagement is the fact that interviewees - even those who were very critical of these issues - explicitly exempted soldiers from their criticism. It seems that although people were eager to challenge other elements of the ANZAC Day narrative, they were reluctant to express any negative sentiment about the soldiers. Whether this reluctance was due to actual personal feelings, or to not wanting to appear insensitive to mass death, remains unclear.

The large number of interviewees who remarked upon the different circumstances and context facing people of the 1910s is evidence that interviewees recognised the complexities of the situation, and the difficulties in understanding past decisions or actions from a contemporary perspective. Yet although their comments on New Zealand's participation in the war, and the official narrative developed to explain this participation, revealed a variety of perspectives and critical reflection, these comments could also be contradictory and contain misunderstandings of the historical reality. In other words, imprecisions exist not only in the country's official narrative of its war engagement, but also in the challenges and questions posed by New Zealanders of this discourse. This realisation perhaps suggests that perspectives on a single, one-sided discourse may themselves also be limited, and points to the need to gather multitudinous viewpoints in order to paint as complete a picture as possible. Alternatively, the imprecisions inherent within the interviews may also be symptomatic of the historical era in which the interviews were held, in which the trauma and victimhood resulting from war tend to be emphasised above other aspects. As a result, it is possible that contemporary observers of ANZAC Day and war commemoration are more concerned with recognising the human impacts of war than other elements, including historical facts. More targeted investigation would be needed to begin to determine the exact reasons for the inaccuracies in interviewees' commentary, including soliciting more detailed information about interviewees' awareness of New Zealand's (military) history. As the "ANZAC

Remembered” project develops and key themes are identified, there is scope to introduce this sort of questioning into future interviews.

The relatively small number of interviewees in this sample makes it difficult to reveal any statistical trends in opinion; the interviews divulged no obvious patterns in attitudes when aggregated by gender, age or military service. Even having a family connection to the First World War did not appear to determine if people felt strongly pro- or anti- the war or New Zealand’s participation in it. In fact, the overarching conclusion which can be drawn from interviewees’ comments is that contemporary New Zealanders, regardless of their demographics or circumstances, tend to ponder, question and sometimes actively challenge the standard, officialised narrative of war commemoration. In this way, they demonstrate interest in and engagement with the deeper themes underpinning ANZAC Day, such as war, peace, myth, commemoration, sacrifice and legacy.

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