



Heroes of Swanson

Part 19



JOSEPH KOKICH



Rod Harry

Resources used

New Zealand in the First World War 1914–1918 O. E. Burton

Online Cenotaph, Auckland Museum

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Military Personnel File, Archway Archives Govt NZ

Onward: Portraits of the NZ Expeditionary Force Volumes 1-4 P.J. Beattie and M. Pomeroy

NZ History.govt.nz

Gone West – Great War Memorials of Waitakere and their Soldiers Sandra Coney

Rugged determination – Historic Window on Swanson 1854-2004 Jack Adam, Vivien

Burgess, Dawn Ellis

West – The History of Waitakere Finlay MacDonald and Ruth Kerr

NZ Births, Deaths and Marriages Index

Land Information NZ (LINZ)

Ancestry.com.au

Various other online resources

Heroes of Swanson Series

Part 1 Forbes James McCammon

Part 2 Gilbert Samuel Hall

Part 3 Arthur Vere George Rolfe

Part 4 Samuel Robert Cassidy

Part 5 David Rogers

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Part 7 Frederick James Mettam

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Part 13 James and William O'Meara

Part 14 Thomas Briddock

Part 15 Julien, Joseph and Francis Paitry

Part 16 William Wallbank

Part 17 Frank Newton

Part 18 Patrick Rice

Part 19 Joseph Kokich

Copies of “Heroes of Swanson” are available at the Online Cenotaph, Auckland Museum and at the Henderson Library Research Centre

Other Swanson History stories

The Railway at Swanson

Mettam Family History

All of the above titles are available on request from the email below

About the Author

Rod Harry BA Dip Tch is a retired teacher and Principal of Kelston Primary School.

He has been a resident of Swanson since 1994, living on Sequester Farm in Christian Road.

He has written 10 unpublished books recording his family history, distributed to the wider Harry family. Some copies are held in the Auckland Central Library and Henderson Library Research Centres.

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Joseph Kokich

Josip Kokic was born on 5 January 1886 in Podgora, Dalmatia, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He had a brother, Stjepan, born about 1882. They were the sons of Marijana Kokica (Mariano Kokich).

Podgora is a small village on the coast of the Adriatic Sea, about half way between Split and Dubrovnik. (Not to be confused with similarly named Podgorica)

Dalmatia is a province of the central Adriatic coast of Croatia. For centuries it was exploited by the city-state of Venice and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Opportunities for illiterate peasants, living on rocky islands and a ribbon of fertile coast, were limited to subsistence farming, grape-growing, quarrying, fishing and seafaring. In the 1880s a population increase put pressure on scarce land.

In 1892 Austria-Hungary signed a trade agreement with Italy that excluded Dalmatia. Around the same time the pest phylloxera arrived in Dalmatia, decimating vineyards. In search of better opportunities, men sailed for the far corners of the world. Many were also escaping the Austrian army's conscription, introduced in 1881.

The first Dalmatians in New Zealand probably arrived via the Californian and Australian goldfields. By the early 1860s they were prospecting South Island diggings. In the 1880s some began pulling golden kauri gum from Northland's gumfields. Wayfarers returning home described 'Nova Zelanda' as a land of good prospects.



“‘Nova Zelanda!’ They said the name over, liking the promise that it held. Father Ilya had even got them a piece of the kauri gum from the museum in Vienna. It looked rich and wonderful stuff. They all wanted to hold it, to feel its polished smoothness, to look into its mottled depths for a sign of the future. ‘A new kind of gold!’ Stipan’s grandfather, old Dida Petar, the village stareshina (patriarch) pronounced, and Father Ilya said: ‘It means gold and that’s what you’ll never get if you stay here. I tell you young men, go. Look for a better life in a new country far from the troubles here.’”



An ancient Kauri tree



Kauri gum in its developed and natural states

How gum forms

Kauri gum is a resin (a sticky substance) produced by New Zealand's giant kauri trees. The resin helps protect the tree by filling in holes and damaged areas. Kauri trees can live for more than 1,000 years, so they make a lot of gum over a lifetime. As the trees die and fall, the ground where they grew becomes littered with kauri gum. Over time, this often gets covered by soil or swamps. Most kauri gum is found in Northland.

Māori uses

Māori called kauri gum kāpia.

- They chewed it like chewing gum.
- They used gum to start fires, because it burns easily.
- They mixed the soot from burnt gum with oil or fat, and used it in moko (facial tattoos).

European uses

From the 1840s, kauri gum was exported to Britain and America to make varnish. Later, it was used in linoleum, a floor covering.

Gum digging

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many people headed for the gumfields of Northland, hoping to find gum and sell it. They dug it out of the ground and found it in swamps. Many of these areas no longer had kauri trees – they were scrublands covered in Mānuka. Dalmatians, Māori and British worked as diggers. They used a spear to find gum and a specially designed spade to dig it up.

A hard life

Gum digging was hard work, and it was difficult to make enough money. Diggers lived in rough huts. They worked six days a week, and spent their evenings cleaning the gum by scraping it with a knife. Some also made ornaments by melting or carving the gum.

The gum trade

Storekeepers bought kauri gum from diggers. It was then taken to the nearest port and shipped to Auckland, where gum merchants cleaned it, graded it and exported it. From 1850 to 1900, kauri gum was Auckland's main export.

Gum from trees

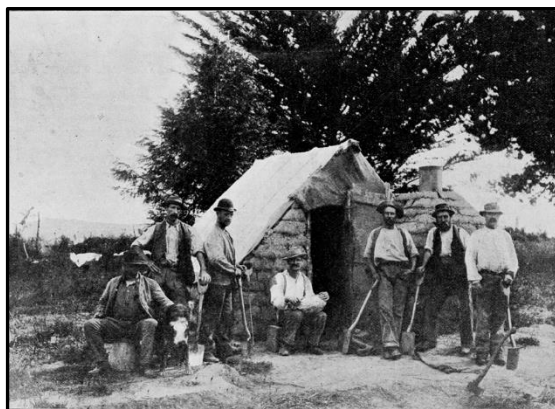
In the 1890s, it was getting harder to find gum in the ground. People started climbing living kauri trees to get gum. Some cut the trees, to make them bleed gum – but this often killed the trees.

End of the industry

The kauri gum industry continued into the 20th century. In the 1930s, cheaper materials for making varnish were invented. The price of kauri gum fell, and by the 1940s the gum industry was coming to an end.

Stjepan and Josip Kocic came to New Zealand in 1905 and worked as gumdiggers in Houhora in the far north. They anglicized their names to Stephen and Joseph Kokich and both became naturalised New Zealanders on 31 January 1906 at the ages of 24 and 21 years respectively while working up there. Soon after, they had both moved to Swanson, West Auckland, and initially continued their gumdigging occupation. By the parliamentary election of 1908 Stephen was listed as a farmer and Joseph as a settler in Swanson, in the Eden Electorate.

In 1911, they were both still in Swanson in the Eden Electorate, listed as farmer and settler. On 21 December 1910, Stephen purchased Lot 126, 55 acres, in the Parish of Waipareira, on the western side of Tram Valley Road. He had also acquired Lot 170, 50 acres, on the other side of the same road. By the 1914 election, Joseph had moved on, but Stephen was still farming in Swanson.



Gumdiggers' hut in Swanson



Knox General Store and Gum Store in Swanson

In December 1897 a new company by the same name took over the old property, again with its headquarters in London, although two thirds of shares were owned by New Zealanders.

The company held leases both east and west of the Waihi Mine, what is now the open pit. The western leases yielded no gold, despite four shafts sunk. The eastern leases contain a main shaft to 500 metres, on the Empire Lode, which also ran through the Waihi Mine.

Much money was expended on men, machinery and exploration, and a further £100,000 was raised from shareholders in 1904. A 40 stamp battery had been purchased from the Kauri Freehold Gold Estates Company of Opitonei in 1906 (later increased to 60 stamps). It was not until around this time the mine actual started producing gold. One party involved with the mine claimed in 1912, one million had been spent developing the mine, with only £40,000 given as dividends.

Ore production peaked in 1914, with 450-500 men employed. Production decreased from 1919 to 1926, as ore reserves were exhausted, and no new ones were found within the lease. In 1926, the company leased its ground to the neighbouring Waihi Gold Mining Company, on a profit sharing arrangement. This continued until 1939, when the Waihi Company purchased the ground and company.”

Joseph volunteered for the Expeditionary Force while at Waihi and was medically examined there on 16 December 1915. He stated that he was working as a miner, was Single, and of Roman Catholic religion. His was aged 29, He was 5ft 8in high, weight 11st 7lb, had dark complexion, dark hair, dark brown eyes. He passed his Medical and was declared FIT for service in the Army overseas.

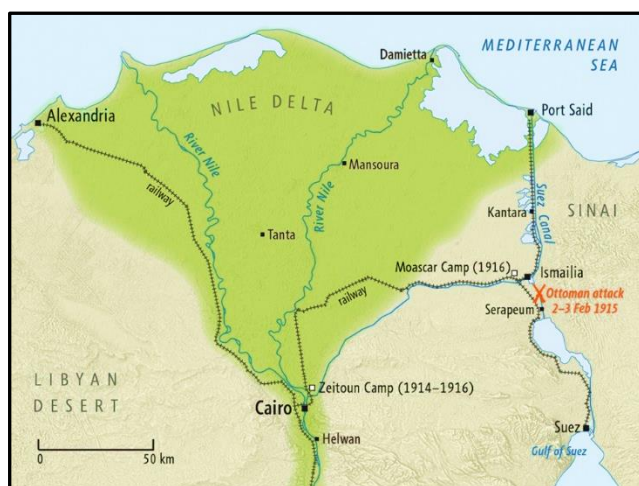
Joseph officially enlisted on 11 January 1916 at Trentham Camp, Upper Hutt. He attested on the following day. Attestation was the process of providing some personal details, swearing allegiance to the King, and agreeing to obey all orders from officers for the duration of his war service. He gave his brother, Stephen Kokich, Swanson, as his Next of Kin.

He was assigned the Serial Number S/n12/4457, but it was later changed to S/n11490. He became a Private, A Coy, 12th Reinforcement, AIB (Auckland Infantry Battalion).

After 4 months in camp, the 12th Reinforcements embarked on 1 May 1916 from Wellington to Suez on HMNZT 51 “Ulimaroa”. The usual route was via Albany, West Australia, then to Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and finally up the Red Sea to Suez. They disembarked at Suez on 9 June 1916 and travelled by train to Moascar Camp near Ismailia on the Suez Canal.



HMNZT51 “Ulimaroa”



NZ Expeditionary Camps in Egypt

After nearly a month in Egypt, they embarked from Alexandria on 26 July 1916 and disembarked at Southampton, England on 7 August 1916. They marched in to Sling Camp at Bulford the same day and Joseph was posted to the Auckland Coy.

Sling Camp

When the New Zealand Division was transferred from Egypt to France in April 1916, there was left behind in Egypt, with a specially selected staff of officers and non-commissioned officers, the nucleus of a Training Battalion for each Infantry Brigade. The 1st and 2nd Brigade training battalions each consisted of Auckland, Canterbury, Otago, and Wellington companies, each company to supply reinforcements for the corresponding service battalion. The 3rd Brigade Training Battalion consisted of New Zealand Rifle Brigade personnel only.



Sling Camp

In order to facilitate administration, it was decided to transfer the Base and Training Depot to England. Sling Camp, near Bulford, Salisbury Plain, where the British section of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force was encamped in 1914, was allotted for this purpose; and the training battalions, together with other arms of the service, numbering forty-one officers and seven hundred and four other ranks, left Alexandria on May 31st, 1916, disembarked at Plymouth on June 10th, and arrived the same day at Sling, where each unit was accommodated in a separate hutted camp.

Training under unit commanders began at once, and arrangements were made for the training of infantry officers and non-commissioned officers at various schools of instruction in the Southern Command. Those who obtained first-class passes were appointed instructors at Sling in their respective subjects.

Reinforcements at the rate of approximately one thousand per month continued to arrive from New Zealand, where they had received from eight to sixteen weeks' elementary training. On arrival at Sling a reinforcement lost its identity as such, and was absorbed into the various Regiments of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, as far as possible in accordance with the districts in New Zealand where the men normally resided. They immediately commenced a course of training, the duration of which varied according to the urgency of the demand from France.



NZ troops training in mine detection at Sling Camp

Men from New Zealand or from hospital who had had previous service overseas were posted to their original regiments, and received a short refresher course, chiefly in musketry and trench warfare. All

troops were graded in platoons according to the degree of efficiency attained, backward men being set back into less advanced platoons. The training was severe, lasting from 6.30 a.m. until 9 p.m., often seven days a week, but the health of the troops was excellent.

Good rifle ranges, a live bombing ground, and a gas chamber were available in the immediate vicinity, and the large areas of undulating War Department land alongside the camp were eminently suitable for training in field operations by day and by night. Large vehicle sheds and gutted stables and three covered miniature ranges were used for indoor instruction in wet weather.

Owing to the heavy casualties to the Division during the Battle of the Somme, 1916, the demand for reinforcements during this period was very great, and training was reduced to an intensified course covering from eight to twenty-eight days, according to the demand. When the demand for reinforcements again became normal, each draft arriving from New Zealand was given four weeks' training at Sling.

It had always been held that the four weeks' course of training at Sling was not sufficient to produce the standard of efficiency required in France. Owing to the great distance of New Zealand from the theatre of war, the training there was as not up-to-date and complete as it would otherwise have been, and much of the training at Sling was necessarily of an elementary nature. Towards the end of 1917, therefore, the course was lengthened to eight weeks, with very satisfactory results.

The camp also housed some New Zealand conscientious objectors (among them Archibald Baxter and his brothers Alexander and John) who had been forced to join the army and were sent all the way from New Zealand to England to make an example of them.

In 1918, there were 4,300 men at Sling and the camp suffered large casualties as a result of the Spanish influenza.

After the end of the war, there were 4600 New Zealand troops stationed at the camp and the camp became a repatriation centre. At that time there was unrest in other camps as a result of delays in demobilising troops. To try to restore order the "spit and polish" regime was enforced and route marches ordered. The men requested a relaxation of discipline as the war was over and they were far from home, however this was refused and the troops rioted, stealing food from the mess and all of the alcohol from the officers' mess.

In an attempt to resolve the situation, the officers and men were promised no repercussions, but this promise was not honoured; and somewhat ironically the ringleaders were arrested, jailed and immediately shipped back to New Zealand.

To occupy them, the New Zealand soldiers were put to work carving the shape of a large Kiwi in the chalk of the hill that overlooks the camp. The Bulford Kiwi as it is known is still there today.



Sling Camp and the Bulford Kiwi



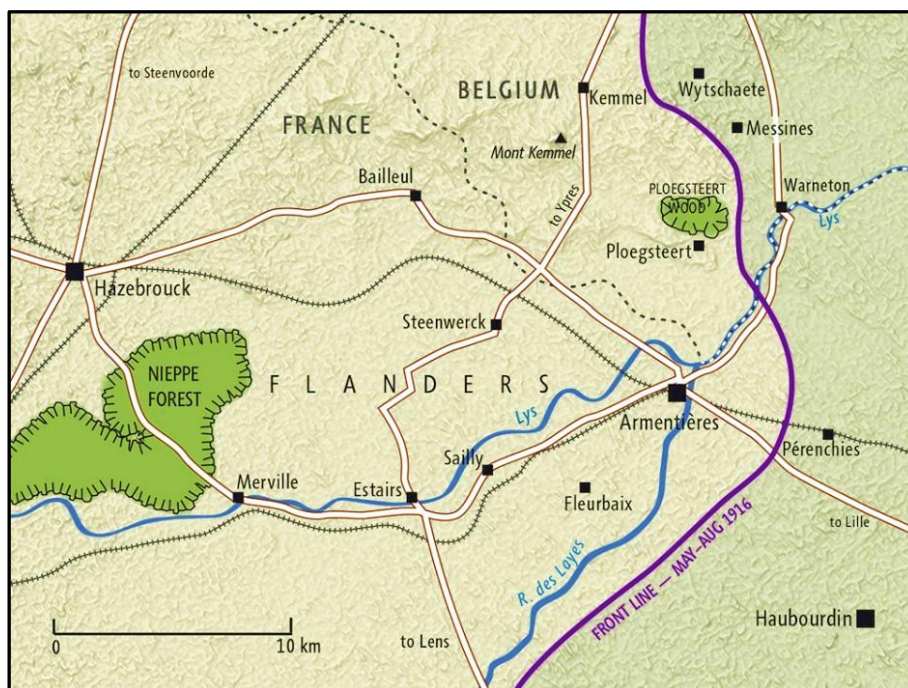
NZ camps and hospitals in England

Joseph left Sling camp for France on 5 September 1916 and was attached to NZ Base, Étaples the same day.

Étaples, France

The NZ Expeditionary Force maintained an Infantry and General Base Depot in Étaples, France, where troops were housed on their way to the front, and were “toughened up” ready for the trenches. Most of the other Empire armies, Britain, Australia, Canada, India and South Africa also had bases there.

After a month training at Étaples, Joseph was posted to Otago Infantry Regiment, 8th Coy, 2nd Battalion in the field on 5 October 1916. The NZ Division had just been withdrawn from the Somme battlefields where it had suffered heavy casualties. During the rest of 1916, the NZ Division was stationed in the quiet sector of Armentières where there were no major battles. The various battalions of the Division rotated in and out of the frontline every few days, carried out minor raids on the German trenches, resisted the German raids on their trenches, and otherwise spent their time repairing the frontline defences.



The “quiet” Armentières Sector

Battle of Messines

By mid-1917, Field Marshall Haig, the Supreme Commander of the British Empire Forces, was planning an offensive in the heavily defended Ypres region of Flanders. His plan involved a series of steps, the first of which was the capture of Messines Ridge by II ANZAC Corps. The New Zealand Division, already in the Messines sector, was given the task of capturing Messines Village and it began intensive training for the forthcoming battle under the close supervision of General Russell. Extensive preparatory work was carried out, with transportation infrastructure laid down and ample supplies of shells brought forward for the artillery.

The plan of attack, broken into three phases, called for the 2nd and Rifle Brigades to carry out an initial advance to the trenches on the western slopes of the Messines ridge as well as the village itself. The 1st Brigade was then to take over for the second phase and advance to the eastern slope of the ridge, an objective designated the Black Line. The final phase was also to involve the 1st Brigade, which was to push the front line out 270 metres (300 yd) via a series of outposts, designated the Dotted Black Line. This outpost line would serve as the starting point for the advance of the 4th Australian Division, which was to continue the attack to what was designated as the Green Line, a mile from the crest of the ridge.



New Zealand troops manning the trenches in the Messines sector, May 1917

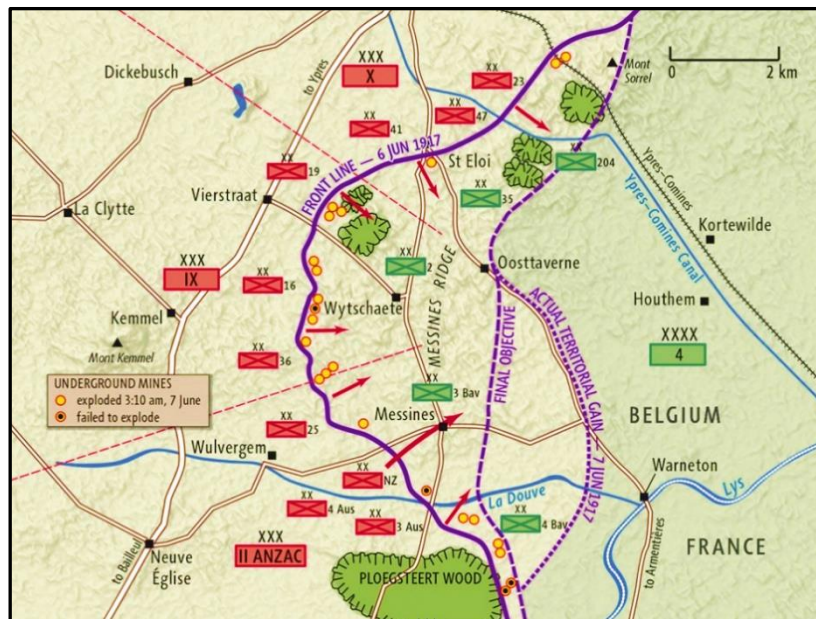
Following a preparatory artillery barrage which began on 3 June, the battle commenced in the early hours of 7 June with the explosion of nineteen mines which had been dug under the German lines. Over a million pounds (about 450 tonnes) of explosive were used, and the tremors were felt as far away as London. (Four other mines failed to detonate). The New Zealanders were in the centre of the II ANZAC front, flanked by the British 25th Division and the 3rd Australian Division. This marked the first time the Australians and New Zealanders had fought alongside each other in a major engagement on the Western Front. The 2nd and Rifle Brigades quickly moved forward; the surviving German soldiers encountered initially were still dazed from the detonation of the mines and were quickly subdued and made prisoners of war. They continued to advance into stiffening resistance, but these opponents, soldiers of the 40th (Saxon) and 3rd (Bavarian) Divisions, were soon dealt with and the outskirts of Messines village were within sight.

As planned, the 1st Brigade reached the Black Line shortly after 5:00 am and began preparing for the next phase of the advance, the establishment of the Dotted Black Line. By 9:00 am, under the cover of a creeping artillery barrage, platoons from the brigade's 2nd Auckland Battalion moved forward and formed a series of outposts, some of which were close to the Green Line. They were well dug in by midday, and handily placed to fend off German counterattacks. At 3:00 pm, the advance was continued by the 4th Australian Division, supported by the New Zealand artillery.

In the chaos of that day, Joseph was reported missing, but was found later in the day, 7 June 1917.

The 1st Brigade consolidated its positions. That evening, aware that the Germans were likely to lay down a retaliatory artillery barrage, General Russell ordered that only a minimum number of troops were to remain in Messines and most personnel moved back to their original positions. The next day, the expected barrage began. The New Zealanders remained in position until 9 June, when they were relieved by the 4th Australian Division.

It was a successful operation for the division; all objectives were achieved on schedule, with over 400 Germans, several field guns, and numerous machine guns and trench mortars being captured. Losses in the division amounted to 3,700 casualties, most of which were actually incurred while holding the captured ground. These casualties were inflicted despite Russell's attempts to keep the number of soldiers in the frontline defences to a minimum and to rely on artillery and machine guns as his primary means for defending against counterattacks.



Battle of Messines

Joseph came through this battle unharmed. He left for the United Kingdom on leave on 11 September 1917 and rejoined the battalion on 22 September 1916.

Third Battle of Ypres

The first bite of a projected five-stage attack was launched on 20 September 1917 — an operation in which Brigadier-General Bernard Freyberg's British brigade was involved (though he was wounded the day before). It succeeded admirably, as did the second bite on 26 September, causing much anxiety among the German defenders, who scrambled to develop a response to Plumer's tactic. Their reliance on immediate and well-organised counter-attacks to dislodge attacking troops from their gains had been proved to be disastrous in the face of effective artillery support.

The next bite was scheduled for 4 October amid rising optimism at GHQ that a way through had at last been found. Among the forces that moved forward to make this next attack were both Birdwood's I Anzac Corps and Godley's II Anzac Corps. For the first and only time, the two Anzac corps would attack alongside each other.

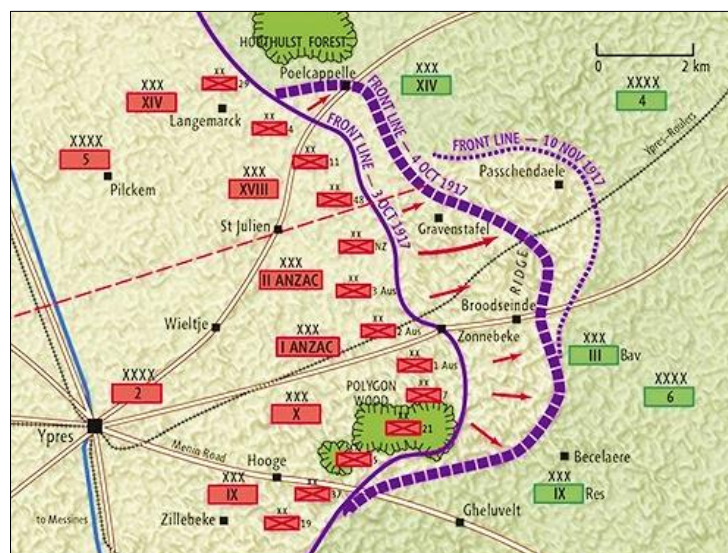
The New Zealand Division made its first attack on 4 October 1917. Its role was to cover an Australian assault on the Broodseinde Ridge to the south. The New Zealanders' objective was Gravenstafel Spur, the first of two spurs from the main ridge at Passchendaele (the other was Bellevue Spur). Once again artillery played a big part in the success of the attack, which was made by Brigadier-General Charles Melvill's 1st Brigade and Brigadier-General Herbert Hart's 4th Brigade, the latter's only major action.

The bombardment, which began at 6 a.m., caught many Germans in the front lines, the result of a desperate change of approach designed to combat the bite and hold tactic. With the counter-attack response unavailing, the Germans had decided to try to stop any new attack at the outset. Whereas previously the front-line trenches had been occupied by minimal forces, men were now packed into them. The result was heavy casualties. Many New Zealanders believed, incorrectly, that the presence of so many enemy dead in the forward position was a sign that they had pre-empted a German attack.

Although the going was difficult — ‘The mud is a worse enemy than the German’, divisional commander Sir Andrew Russell complained — the New Zealand troops advanced 1000 m to secure the spur and consolidate their position. More than 1000 prisoners were taken, but the attack was costly. Among the New Zealand Division’s 1600 casualties, some 500 men had been killed or mortally wounded.

The great success of 4 October led to a fatal miscalculation by the British high command. Mistakenly concluding that enemy resistance was faltering, and aware that the Germans had little in the way of prepared positions behind Passchendaele, Haig now looked to deliver the long anticipated knockout blow. He ordered his cavalry to move up ready to exploit the expected breakthrough in the next planned attack, which he wanted to bring forward by two days, but settled for one. British and Australian troops would make this attack on 9 October.

Once again, Joseph came through this battle unharmed.



Third Battle of Ypres otherwise known as the battle of Passchendaele

In rapidly deteriorating conditions, adherence to the five-stage timetable was a recipe for disaster. On II Anzac Corps’ front, the attacking forces, the British 49th and 66th Divisions, struggled to get into position. Artillery preparations were hindered by problems in getting guns forward. The gunners failed to open the way, especially by cutting the enemy barbed wire. In the face of strong German resistance, the attack collapsed with heavy casualties.

Ever since 1917, Passchendaele has been a byword for the horror of the Great War. In terms of lives lost in a single day, the failed attack on Bellevue Spur on 12 October was probably the greatest disaster in New Zealand’s history.

Eight days earlier, around 500 New Zealanders died during the capture of Gravenstafel Spur, one of two spurs on the ridge above the village of Passchendaele in Flanders, Belgium. Although this attack was successful, it had a tragic aftermath. The British High Command mistakenly concluded that the number of German casualties meant enemy resistance was faltering and resolved to make another push immediately.

An attack on 9 October by British and Australian troops was to open the way for II ANZAC Corps to capture Passchendaele on the 12th. The plan failed. Without proper preparation and in the face of strong German resistance, the 9 October attack collapsed with heavy casualties.

The New Zealanders nevertheless began their advance at 5.25 a.m. on the 12th. The preliminary artillery barrage had been largely ineffective because thick mud made it almost impossible to bring heavy guns forward, or to stabilise those that were in position. Exposed to raking German machine-gun fire from both the front and the flank, and unable to get through uncut barbed wire, the New Zealanders were pinned down in shell craters. Another push scheduled for 3 p.m. were postponed and then cancelled.

The troops eventually fell back to positions close to their start line. For badly wounded soldiers lying in the mud, the aftermath of the battle was a private hell; many died before rescuers could reach them. The toll was horrendous: 843 New Zealand soldiers were either dead or lying mortally wounded between the front lines.

Joseph was wounded in the action of 12 October 1917. After being attended to at a First Aid Post, he was admitted to No.1 NZ Field Ambulance on 13 October 1917 with a serious gunshot wound to his right thigh. From there he was admitted to No.44 CCS on 13 October 1917. He was transferred to AT26 (Ambulance Transport) on 14 October 1917.

Next, he was admitted No 9 General Hospital, Rouen – “GSW right thigh serious” 16 October 1917.

First Aid Post/Field Ambulance – The first level of casualty care where stretcher bearers brought in the wounded, and sick soldiers reported for medical attention – virtually in the frontline trenches.



First Aid Post



NZ Field Ambulance

Casualty Clearing Station -The most forward unit where specialist surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses, radiologists and a dentist were to be found – just behind the frontline trenches.



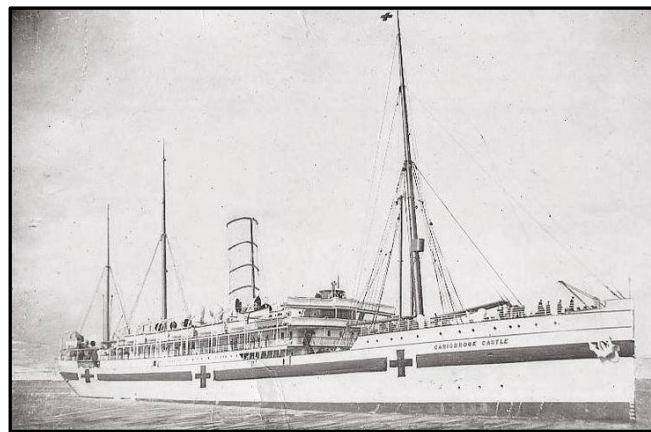
1st Australian Casualty Clearing Station (CCS)

Stationary or General Hospitals – Back from the front line in France, close to a railway to receive casualties and generally near a port for evacuation to England of patients requiring longer-term treatment.



One of the many General Hospitals in Rouen, France

After having his wound stabilized, Joseph was transferred to England on 19 October 1917 via AT Carisbrook (His Majesty's Hospital Ship Carisbrook Castle).



HMHS Carisbrook Castle

Joseph was admitted to No1 NZ General Hospital, Brockenhurst on 21 October 1917 and stayed there four months. From there he was admitted to NZ Convalescent Hospital, Hornchurch on 19 February 1918.

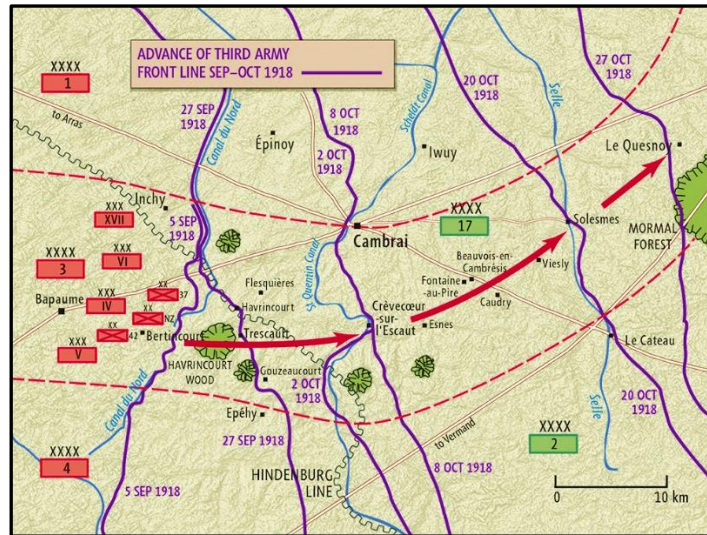
After his wound had healed and he was fully mobile again, Joseph was admitted to Command Depot, Codford on 22 March 1918. Soldiers recovered from wounds or serious illness were sent there to be assessed for a return to the battlefield or repatriation to New Zealand. Unfortunately for Joseph, he was assessed as fit for a return to the war front.

He marched into Sling Camp again on 11 July 1918. After three months regaining his fitness for war, he left for France on 24 October 1918 and marched in to Étapes on 27 October 1918.

Joseph rejoined his Battalion on 4 November 1918, just in time to participate in the Battle of Mormal Forest, the last day the Otago Regiment fought in World War 1.

Mormal Forest

As battles go, Mormal Forest was more a scuffle than a set-to. Its 11 deaths were a small toll compared with some of the atrocious days the Otago Regiment endured in World War 1. However, unbeknown to the participants, the assault on the morning of November 5, 1918, was to be the last action by the Otagos in the war.



The advance to Le Quesnoy and Mormal Forest

Fittingly perhaps, the dawn attack was accompanied by that Western Front staple - miserable, driving rain. Soldiers moved up towards the front lines throughout the early hours of the morning, before the attack began at 5.30am. That day their mission had three objectives, and was intended to have them advance just over four miles.

Such achievements would have seemed wildly optimistic in 1916 or 1917, when many an attack foundered without even a single yard being gained. However, by 1918 the war had become a much more mobile one: the German March offensive advanced around 40 miles in three weeks, and in response the Allies August offensive regained most of that ground - and more in some places.

In a sad irony, that only made the war more deadly, as soldiers who quit the misery of the trenches also found themselves shorn of their protective value and were more easily hit targets. The Otagos had been in the thick of the action throughout 1918, and the soldiers must have felt a similar anticipation to those at home that the end of the war was near. Certainly, the early stages of the Mormal Forest engagement had that feel about them as the Otagos, supported by the 2nd Canterbury Battalion, marched forward without opposition.

However, at a spot called the Forester's House, the Otagos found Germans in position with reserves in behind on the high ground. An initial attack failed, but the house fell at the second attempt, and two machine guns and 30 prisoners were taken. The regiment's 2nd Battalion then set up its headquarters there.

Forester's House came under artillery fire. A shell destroyed the front of the building. After regathering themselves, the Otagos pushed on. They captured their second objective soon after, and at 1.30pm had secured their final objective.

While they might have felt they could walk all the way to Germany at that point, by 3pm they were ordered to halt and form a defensive line - 7500 yards ahead of where they had started that morning. Reserves arrived in the hours afterwards, and the Otago soldiers then marched the nine miles to Le Quesnoy - liberated by their fellow New Zealanders the previous day.

Two officers and nine other soldiers were killed at Mormal. The official regiment history notes that they were among the last New Zealanders killed in the war, and that they were "reverently laid to rest" on November 6.

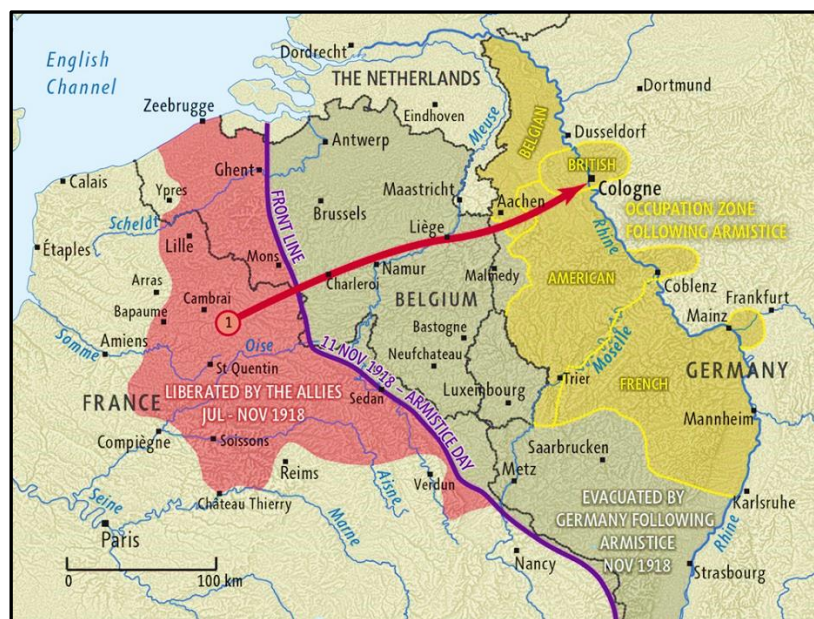


Forester's House, Mormal Forest – showing graves of the last soldiers of the Regiment to fall in action

On Armistice Day – 11 November 1918 - the Otago Regiment was at Le Quesnoy. They greeted the end of hostilities with relief, not joy, the official history said.

"In strange contrast to the extraordinary demonstrations in other parts of the world, there was barely a shout from the billets, except perhaps as a protest against so much noise; and the weary soldier, with a sigh of relief as after a task well done, turned over and went to sleep again."

Some in the Regiment expressed a wish to return to New Zealand when the war ended; however, the New Zealand Division was given occupation duties. On 28 November the Regiment advanced through Belgium towards Germany, on foot due to the damaged rail network. On 1 December, in Bavais, George V and Edward VIII (then Prince of Wales) attended a Church Service with members of the Regiment. They then continued their journey and reached the German border on 20 December 1918. Their final deployment was in Mulheim which they reached by train, boat and on foot. The attitude of the liberated French and Belgian populous was one of unmitigated enthusiasm, while the Germans were reserved, possibly afraid, but not openly hostile.



The advance to Germany

The Regiment's main duties during the occupation of Germany were guarding war supplies and clearing mines. On 4 February 1919 due to thinning ranks as men were sent home, the Regiment was consolidated into a single Otago Battalion. The Otago Battalion was finally amalgamated into the South Island Battalion on 27 February. By the start of April, the South Island Battalion had left Germany. The Otago Infantry Regiment was well represented one last time at a victory parade through London on 3 May and then returned home.

Joseph had gone before the reduction of the regiment to one Battalion. He was detached to the United Kingdom on 14 January 1919. He marched to into Sling Camp and was placed on the Nominal Roll on 23 January 1919. The Nominal Roll was the list of soldiers to be repatriated to New Zealand. He embarked on the "Willochra" from Southampton on 8 March 1919. The ship arrived in Wellington on 15 April 1919.

Joseph was discharged from the army on 13 May 1919 "on termination of period of engagement." His age was 30 years and his medical examination showed everything was ok apart from GSW right thigh – no disability. His Service Abroad was 2yr 350 days. His Total Service was 3yr 123 days Service; in Egypt 1916, Western Europe 1916-18, Army of Occupation 1918-19. Unusually, while Joseph fought on the British and ally's side, his Dalmatian countrymen were part of the Austria-Hungary/German side, so he could well have been fighting his own relatives.

Electoral Rolls of 1919 and 1922 record Joseph as a labourer living at Nihotupu in the Eden Electorate. After that he returned to Dalmatia. Joseph worked from 1926-1946 for the Standard Vacuum Oil Co. in Zagreb. At some point he married Mara Pivac. They returned to Podgora after leaving the oil company, which closed in 1947.

There are no Electoral Roll listings for Stephen Kokich after the war. Nor are there any Birth, Death or Marriage Records for either brother. Stephen sold Lot 170 on 10 August 1916 to James Gunthorpe (sometimes spelt Gunthorp in the official records), farmer of Manurewa. On 14 February 1917 he sold Lot 126 to Ivan Luketina. A family story in Joseph's war record in the Online Cenotaph suggests that Stephen sold up and returned to Dalmatia.

Joseph died 28 May 1950 in Dalmatia at the relatively young age of 64. Mara died in 1988. Joseph was buried in an un-named grave with his brother, Stephen, in the Podgora cemetery.

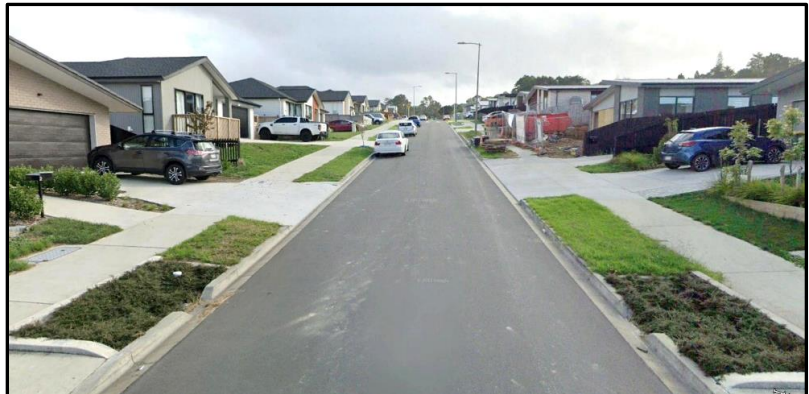
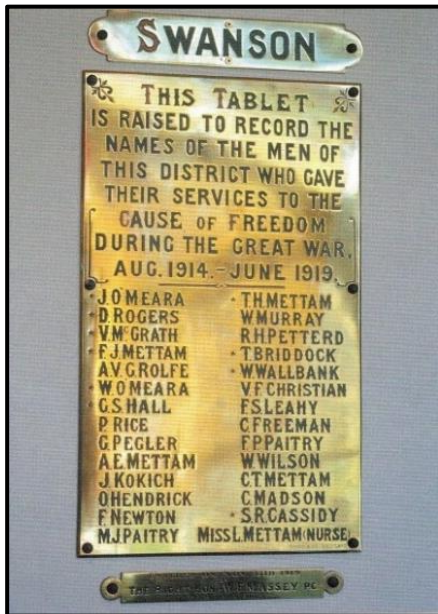
In 2006-2007, Neven Kokic (grandson of Steven) was asked by the town museum in Makarska, another coastal town in Dalmatia, to research the story of Josip Kokic. The first document he found was Josip's demobilization certificate in the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute. After contacting the New Zealand Ministry of Defence, they sent him the records of Josip's military service. They also sent the War Medal and Victory Medal awarded to Joseph Kokich in 1921 but never delivered as he had returned to Podgora before that. The medals had been stored for 90 years.



Victory Medal and British War Medal

With the support of family and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Neven arranged for the grave to be engraved with Joseph's name, also O.I.R Badge and "Kia Mate Toa" (Fight until death), the motto of the Otago Infantry Regiment.

Joseph Kokich is commemorated on a brass plaque in the entrance to Swanson RSA and in a street name in Swanson.



Joseph Kokich Avenue, Swanson