

Sergeant PARETAWA TEWAI

MYSTERY SOLVED: Royal New Zealand Air Force Air Training Corps instructor Sergeant Tewai and his cadets. Extensive research was done to find out why the East Coast man's name is on a cenotaph in the Waikato town of Gordonton. It was revealed he worked in the town and signed up for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force at the Gordontown community hall in 1914.

Picture supplied



Gordonton War Memorial

Researcher clears up Tewai mystery

by Finn Rainger

LIGHT has been shed on the mystery surrounding a deceased Maori war veteran from Tokomaru Bay and the inscription of his name on a cenotaph in the Waikato town of Gordonton — thanks to some thorough independent research.

Paritawa Tewai has had a place on the memorial's honour roll since 1918, along with 40 other soldiers (today there are 59) because the community decided at the time to list the names of all those who left to serve during World War 1.

Mr Tewai was among the 24 who returned. However, until recently his identity was not known to the Gordonton community.

An Anzac researcher from the town teamed with Ngati Wairere and Ngati Porou to try to answer a woman's annual Anzac lament of "who are you boy?", and find out why Paritawa Tewai is inscribed on an roll of honour so far from home.

They discovered that Mr Tewai had spent time in Gordonton and it was no mistake that his name was etched on the obelisk.

In his teens he travelled to Waikato from Gisborne to work on a dairy farm and in 1914, at the age of 18, he signed up for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force at the Gordonton community hall.

Mr Tewai left New Zealand in September 1915 with the Maori Pioneer Corps serving in Egypt, the United Kingdom and France, where he was wounded.

Upon returning to New Zealand in April 1918, the Gordonton community held a

homecoming party for Mr Tewai and another soldier.

Mr Tewai returned to Tokomaru Bay shortly after and appeared in the front row of a returned soldiers' football team photo in 1919.

He was employed as a storeman with the Waipiro Trading Co when he signed up with the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1941 following the outbreak of World War 2.

Before remustering on as an Air Training Corps instructor in February 1946, he held several positions in air defence and as a wireless instructor at bases throughout New Zealand.

In 1955 Mr Tewai was awarded the British Empire Medal for his Air Training Corps work with secondary schools.

He was also awarded the Good Conduct Medal at his bedside on February 18, 1959, when he passed away with his family at his side.

Tewai, who was only 63 at the time and still on active service, was returned to his place of birth and buried in the Tokomaru Bay cemetery.

Although a living relative is yet to come forward, a young Ngati Porou family said they were happy to adopt Mr Tewai and honour his name to help bridge the gap between Gordonton and his Tokomaru Bay home.

Researchers will continue to look for information surrounding Novis, Lynnette and Dick, who placed a death notice for their uncle in 1959.

For now, the memory of Paritawa Tewai has been rekindled for future generations to appreciate.

Also refer to: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/gordonton-first-world-war-memorial> for more information of the Gordonton War Memorial