

Haka made Turks tremble

Brave Maori soldiers gained a reputation as fierce fighters and became equal with their Pakeha comrades for the first time reports Kurt Bayer of NZME.

AUCKLAND — The fierce Maori haka has put the fear of God into opposing international rugby teams for decades.

A century ago, however, when the bloodcurdling war cry rang out across the dusty, sloping battlefields of Gallipoli, it was not done in the name of sport: the Maori Contingent were coming to kill the Turkish defenders.

While the doomed World War 1 escapade needlessly cost tens of thousands of lives, Gallipoli helped forge the early identity of the Maori in fledgling New Zealand.

It secured their reputation as fierce fighters and loyal New Zealanders, and put them on an equal footing with their Pakeha brothers for the first time.

But when New Zealand joined Britain to declare war on Germany on August 5, 1914, the enthusiasm of many Maori to sign up was mixed.

Some opposed fighting for a Crown that had dispossessed them of land in the 19th century.

Other Maori were, like thousands of young New Zealanders, keen to answer the call for king and country, as well as the prospect of an adventure and to be "home by Christmas".

However, imperial policy initially opposed the idea of indigenous people fighting in a war among Europeans.

Historian Matthew Wright wrote in *Shattered Glory: The New Zealand Experience at Gallipoli and the Western Front* that many Maori believed that contributing to the war effort

Maori Pioneer Battalion

2227

Maori and 458 Pacific Islanders served in what became known as the Maori Pioneer Battalion during World War I.

336

died on active service.

734

were wounded.

Of 461

ordinary rank Maori contingent soldiers and 16 officers who fought at Gallipoli, only two officers and 132 men remained at the end.

of the warriors of the Great War God, Tu. As one old grey-haired Maori chief said: 'Oh! If I only had this army of men under me, I could conquer New Zealand!'

The Maori Contingent sailed for Egypt in February 1915 destined to be a garrison force in support of Pakeha fighting troops.

Te Rangi Hiroa was infuriated that the Maori could not fight.

"Our ancestors were a warlike people . . . the members of this war party would be ashamed to face their people at the conclusion of the war if they were to be confined entirely to garrison duty and not be given an opportunity of proving their mettle at the front."

They missed the landings on April 25, 1915, but after horrific losses, top brass decided they should also be sent to the



in Monash Valley and the Turks whose trenches overlooked it . . . They were an elite band . . . 'you got that good you could shoot the left eye out of a fly,' Dr Pugsley wrote in Gallipoli: the New Zealand story.

But like many of his Wellington Regiment comrades, Grace was shot and killed during the Chunuk Bair assault. After his death, his diary was given to his younger brother Richard, who had been studying medicine in Edinburgh when war broke out and signed up for the Royal Scots Guards.

He later became a renowned psychiatrist and used his wartime experiences to treat soldiers who suffered the effects of shellshock.

In the 1960s, Richard passed on Grace's diary to his niece, Wene McMillin. She recently gifted Grace's diary and wartime belongings to his old school, Wellington College.

might improve their position in what was then an effectively segregated society.

"The idea gained ground among iwi (tribes) and was pushed in Parliament during September by Maui Pomare, James Carroll, Apirana Ngata and Te Rangi

Hiroa (Peter Buck). William Massey's Government had not envisaged a Maori contingent but bent to the pressure and — somewhat grudgingly — allowed a small force to be assembled."

Military historian Dr Christopher Pugsley told the NZ Herald that opposition to a Maori Contingent, as opposed to individual Maori serving in the ranks, came from the British Government and not New Zealand.

It was only the commitment of the Indian Corps to France that saw them relent.

The Kiwi attitude contrasted with that across the Tasman.

When war broke out in 1914, many indigenous Australians who tried to enlist were rejected on the grounds of race. It wasn't until 1917 when recruits were harder to find that restrictions were cautiously eased to allow "half-castes" to enlist.

The first Maori unit, known as the Native Contingent, came from tribes across New Zealand.

Rikihana "Bunny" Carheek noted in his war memoir, Home Little Maori Home, that it was the first time that the tribes had united to fight one common enemy.

"The men were of fine physique, deep chested and broad shouldered," Carheek said, as they arrived for training at Avondale racecourse in Auckland.

"Truly these were descendants

Dardanelles on July 5.

Many Maori soldiers had been at Gallipoli from the outset, having volunteered for the provincial infantry battalions.

One was Watene Moeke, who served with the Auckland Regiment as William Moeke,

In what was their first fight on foreign soil, the Maori troops charged Turkish trenches with fixed bayonets and with the cry of the haka "ka mate".

the first Maori casualty of the war, who was killed on April 25.

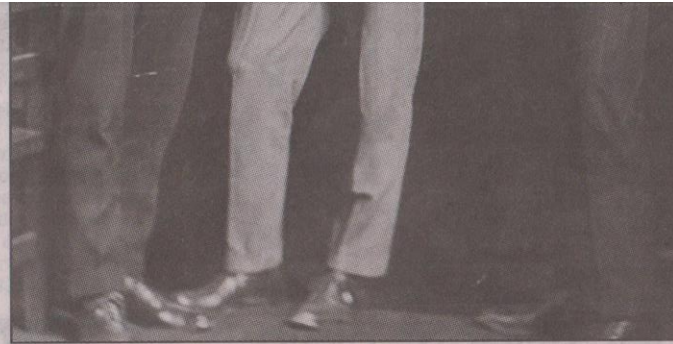
The Maori Contingent's first contact with the enemy in a concerted effort against the enemy was a night attack to capture the heights of Chunuk Bair.

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Acclaimed New Zealand writer and historian James Cowan described the Maori attack on Table Top hill. "The Maoris went into that splendid attack, their first battle with the bayonet, in a mood of savage determination and delight. This was their chance for fame. They went grimly for those Turks, bayoneted them in their lines, they burst into a tremendous haka when they had cleared the trenches. 'Ka mate, ka mate, ka ora, ka ora!' Then silence as they pressed on to the next point."

Dr Monty Soutar, Ministry for Culture and Heritage historian, told the "Gallipoli 1915: a century on" conference in Australia last month that the Maori contingent terrified the Ottomans with their hakas and fighting abilities."

Dr Soutar quoted one British officer as saying: "Yes you can talk about your Australian and New Zealand fighters, but the fiercest fighters on the peninsula were those glorious Maori lads."



Sons of Lawrence Marshall Grace and Te Kahui Grace. (From left) Haami, William Henry, Dr Richard.

Picture taken in 1911 by SP Andrew Ltd

Carheek, who kept an almost daily diary of life at the front, wrote a harrowing account of the doomed Chunuk Bair assault.

"The stream of wounded coming down this valley seemed endless as we wended our way along this veritable valley of death. Here and there we passed the dead not knowing whether they were friends or foes," Carheek said, describing the scenes of August 8.

Carheek would eventually be wounded that day, shot through the base of his neck.

During the Chunuk Bair assault, 17 men of the Native Contingent were killed and 89 were wounded.

One of those killed was 25-year-old Second Lieutenant Thomas Marshall Percy Grace of the Wellington Regiment, a descendant of Horonuku Te Heuheu Tukino IV, paramount chief of Ngati Tuwharetoa.

A talented sportsman who

represented Wellington at both cricket and rugby, as well as the New Zealand Maori rugby team, Grace, known as "Haami" took his competitive instincts and natural abilities to the battlefield, according to Te Papa historian Puawai Cairns.

He was famous for sneaking towards the Turkish trenches with a sack full of bombs,

and using his cricketing skills to "bowl" bombs at them with unerring and deadly accuracy.

Grace also became commander of the first New Zealand sniper sharp-shooting team at Gallipoli, something that he notes in his diary with great pride, Ms Cairns said.

In teams of two, they picked off Turkish snipers who had been

causing deadly havoc on the Allied lines.

"Grace's snipers, posted throughout the valley, placed a barrier as impenetrable as any earthwork between the traffic

but he was by all of the family accounts a very special person and it is a privilege to have his story in our family," said Ms McMillin, 84, who lives at Pukawa, near Taupo in the old homestead where Haami was born. She said the decision to donate the precious possessions to Grace's old college was an easy one.

"It just struck me as the right place for them to go," she told the Herald.

After Chunuk Bair, Alexander Godley, the Major-General in charge of the New Zealand Division, split up the Maori Contingent and Otago Mounted Rifles to reform them into another unit in early 1916 called the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion.

But both battalions protested at losing their identity. Maori recruiting boards refused to send more troops.

Godley eventually relented, and allowed them to reform. When more Maori reinforcements arrived, they became the Maori Pioneer Battalion.

By December 1915, when the Anzac forces were evacuated from Gallipoli, the Maori contingent strength — originally 16 officers and 461 ordinary ranks — stood at two officers and 132 men.

Maori Pioneer Battalion was re-deployed to France as "diggers", arriving there in April 1916.

But it was the Gallipoli experience that helped the Maori forge their own early identity, and also gain them respect as equal Kiwis.

Before the war, many parts of New Zealand had no contact with Maori.

"So one could argue," Dr Pugsley said, "that New Zealanders had to travel to Gallipoli and then the Western Front to gain an appreciation of Maori as fellow New Zealanders."