



# WAR BLACKS


The extraordinary story of  
New Zealand's World War I All Blacks

**MATT ELLIOTT**



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# Dedication

*This book is dedicated to my wife, Melissa,  
ever supportive and enthusiastic,  
especially during a 'three-book year'*

## Epigraph

*The horror and strains that this war would impose on the human spirit were unknown, and never contemplated. There is an air of unreality in looking back on the sailing of the Main Body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force [NZEF] in October 1914. It was more like the start of an international tour by an All Black team rather than soldiers embarking for a war.*

– Christopher Pugsley, military historian

*Another of New Zealand's best known footballers has made the supreme sacrifice after playing the game for the Empire on a wider field.*

— widely published newspaper item noting the death of 1913 All Black  
Reginald Taylor

*I left my best rugby years on the desert.*

– Beethoven 'Beet' Algar, All Black captain (1920)

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**1914**

Sergeant Frederick Harold 'Skin' Masters MM

Trooper Karl Donald Ifwersen

Private Charles McLean MM

Driver Andrew 'Son' White

Sergeant Henry 'Norkey' Dewar

Lieutenant Charles Theodore Gillespie MC

Lieutenant Colonel Henry Esau Avery CMG, CBE, DSO

Sergeant Hubert Sydney 'Jum' Turtill

Second Lieutenant Hohepa 'Harry' Jacob MC

Driver Charles Napoleon 'Nipper' (or 'Nap') Kingstone

Gunner Peter Williams

Captain John Elliott 'Jock' Cuthill

Lieutenant Sergeant William Ernest Smith

**1915**

Sergeant Albert Joseph 'Doolan' Downing

Second Lieutenant Frank Reginald Wilson

Camp Quartermaster Sergeant Edward 'Teddy' James Roberts  
Lance Corporal Reginald Taylor  
Sergeant Charles 'Chas' (or 'Charlie') Brown  
Corporal Lynley Herbert Weston  
Private Thomas William 'Tiger' Lynch  
Sergeant Richard Fogarty MM  
Sergeant James 'Jim' Edward Moffitt MM  
Major William McKail Geddes MC  
Sergeant Beethoven 'Beet' Algar  
Driver Alfred 'Alf' Hubert West  
Major William 'Billy' Spiers Glenn MC  
Rifleman William August 'Jockey' Ford  
Corporal Edmond Ryan  
Bombardier John Alexander McNab  
Private Eric McDonald 'Fritz' Snow  
Rifleman Ernest Arthur 'Moke' Belliss  
Trooper Cyril James Brownlie  
Corporal Albert Robert 'Mick' Lomas  
Private Robert 'Bobby' Stanley Black  
Lieutenant Eric Arthur Percy Cockcroft  
Corporal Leslie 'Les' Frank Cupples MM  
Sergeant Bernard Francis 'Frank' Smyth

## **1916**

Sapper George 'Bear' Loveridge  
Private William Robert Hardcastle  
Lieutenant Colin MacDonald Gilray MC, OBE  
Sergeant Nathaniel Arthur 'Ranji' Wilson  
Driver Edward 'Ned' Hughes  
Gunner Edward William 'Nut' (or 'Nuts') Hasell  
Second Lieutenant Cyril Edward 'Scrum' Evans  
Sapper John Gerald 'Jack' O'Brien  
Private George Maurice Victor Sellars  
Private James 'Jim' McNeece  
Private Michael 'Mick' Joseph Cain  
Private Richard John 'Jock' McKenzie

Private James Alexander Steenson Baird  
Sergeant David 'Dave' Gallaher  
Sergeant Percival 'Percy' Wright Storey  
Corporal Maurice John Brownlie  
Corporal Harold Vivian 'Toby' Murray  
Lance Corporal Johnstone 'Jock' Richardson  
Trooper James Hislop Parker MM, CBE  
Trooper 'Dean' Eric Tristram Harper  
Lieutenant Stanley Keith Siddells  
Private Eric Leslie Watkins  
Gunner Charlie Edward 'Bronco' Seeling  
Staff Sergeant Major James Ryan  
Sergeant John Victor Macky

## **1917**

Private Robert Graham Tunnicliff  
Corporal Cecil 'Ces' Edward Oliver Badeley  
Second Lieutenant John 'Jack' Ormond/Tiaka Omana  
Private Henry Gordon 'Abe' Munro  
Driver Brian Verdon McCleary  
Trooper Charles John Compton Fletcher  
Private Frances 'Frank' Beresford Young  
Trooper James 'Buster' Barrett  
Second Lieutenant Robert Gemmell Burnett 'Jimmy' Sinclair  
Lance Sergeant Ernest 'Ernie' Henry Dodd  
Corporal William Charles Francis  
Sapper Sidney 'Sid' David Shearer  
Private Leonard Frederick 'Jack' Stohr  
Rifleman Alfred 'Alf' Lewis Kivell  
Private David Lindsay 'Scotty' Baird  
Driver William Richard 'Bill the Bull' Irvine  
Private Samuel William Gemmell  
Sapper John Alexander 'Peppy' Bruce  
Private Donald Cameron Hamilton  
Lance Corporal Alfred 'Alf' Henry Netherwood Fanning  
Private Jack Douglas Shearer

Corporal Henry Morgan Taylor  
Rifleman Lancelot Matthew Johnson  
Private James Burt Douglas  
Rifleman Richard 'Dick' William Roberts  
Rifleman Alexander James 'Jimmy' Ridland  
Gunner William Frankham Snodgrass  
Corporal Francis 'Frank' Turnbull Glasgow

## **1918**

Staff Sergeant Major Frederick 'Fred' Elder Birbeck Ivimey  
Rifleman William Rognvald Fea  
Corporal Alexander 'Alex' McDonald

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## Introduction

The sad fate of 13 men who had worn the black jersey and silver fern in representing their country as All Blacks has been the subject of numerous newspaper and book mentions in the century since their deaths during World War I. Such is the place of rugby football in our country's psyche that those men are remembered today because of their place in the history of rugby, in a way that many of our other sporting champions tend not to be. This book sets out to record the contributions of All Blacks, both famous and forgotten, to the war effort of 1914–18. Some men were All Blacks, then soldiers. Others were soldiers, wearing the double silver fern of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF), then All Blacks. Most spent much longer in khaki than they did in black.

For a long time I had wanted to know just how many All Blacks experienced Samoa, Gallipoli, Sinai and Palestine, the Western Front, base depots in England or training camps at home. In 1981, esteemed rugby historians Rod Chester and Neville McMillan published their first *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand Rugby*, containing potted profiles of every man who had taken the field as an All Black to that point. In it, the service records and decorations from World War I were included in the biographies of about a third of the 93 men included in this book. There were, of course, many more men whose war experiences were not mentioned, so in the last months of 2014 I began searching for them and, by the time of the centenary of the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) landings at Gallipoli, I had compiled the list that makes up this book.

Our rugby history is recorded in detail that is not matched anywhere in the world, which means that it is easy to chart the careers of our All Blacks. The history of our involvement in World War I, and the men and women who were among the 110,000 who served, is a different matter. While there has been a plethora of new material available in recent years (to which this

author has been a contributor), official regimental or battalion histories written in the years after the Armistice were about the respective groups of men, rather than individuals. So, I have tried to, where possible, situate soldiers in the specifics of their service rather than just within the larger group.

At the same time, this book charts the effect of the Great War on our great game and the role our national sport played as recreation for servicemen. Where our soldiers went, so did rugby football. From there, Services rugby and war veterans were an integral part of the revival of the game and made up one of New Zealand's greatest-ever football teams, the 1924–25 'Invincibles'.

When it comes to army service, I have included the time men spent in training rather than just the time spent overseas. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, some men spent up to a year at Trentham and Featherston camps before sailing overseas. Thus, their time overseas would not be properly representative of their military service. Secondly, one or two conscripted men (towards the end of the war) spent time in camp and did not go overseas. That tells a story in itself of the final stages of the war, and to exclude them when they did serve their country would not be fair to their memory.

Today, rugby, like no other sport, is described in the terminology of war. At the beginning of the Great War, that escalating conflict was being described as 'the game'. The reality became something very different. My then 19-year-old grandfather wrote in his 1917 diary while fighting on the Western Front that the war was 'a living hell'. Today's players may talk about other players they would want 'to go to battle with' or 'have in the trenches' with them, but you never hear a rugby game being described as 'a living hell'.

The experiences of war were unspeakable for many who endured them, whereas the exploits of rugby players on the field have been told and retold for decades. I hope this book adds to the history of our national game and our consideration of the men who played and fought. As Richie McCaw said of Victoria Cross winner Willie Apiata, who was involved with the All Blacks during the 2015 Rugby World Cup, 'He's a good man to have around, and the boys enjoyed hearing a few of his stories and calming words. If you talk about being in pressure environments, he's probably been