

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Having a Good War During a Bad Year: Herbert Hart in 1917

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Abstract

To have ‘a good war’ may be defined as ‘making the most of the opportunities presented to one during wartime’. This article focuses on one man who had a good war between 1914 and 1918; with a particular focus on 1917.

In 1914 Herbert Hart was a small-town solicitor and officer in the part-time Territorial Force. By the end of the First World War he was a much decorated and highly regarded brigadier-general. The factors that led to Hart having a good war and how they can be seen at work during his career in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force are assessed in this article. How having a good war and becoming a senior officer changed Hart’s experience of war on the western front and the trajectory of his life are also examined.

Keywords

Brigadier; First World War; Herbert Hart; good war; NZEF

INTRODUCTION

For the British empire and its allies 1917 was a bad year which saw the failure of major offensives on the western front and the collapse of the Russian empire’s war effort. Even in a bad year, however, some men and women were having ‘a good war’. The concept of having ‘a good war’ is rather alien to twenty-first century sensibilities, but during and after the First World War it was not an uncommon expression.¹ To have ‘a good war’ may be defined as making ‘the most of the opportunities presented to one during wartime’.² This article looks at one man who had a good war in 1917: Brigadier-General Herbert Hart (Fig. 1).

In 1914, Hart was a 31-year-old solicitor and major in the part-time Territorial Force in the small Wairarapa town of Carterton.³ By the end of 1917 he was a well-known and highly respected senior officer in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF). In this

article the key factors that led to Hart and other men having a good war are outlined. The focus will be on Hart’s career during 1917; how his experience of war on the western front changed during that year; and how having a good war changed the course of his life.

There are, in my view, five main factors that in combination could lead to a military officer having a good war. These are opportunity, luck, courage, resilience, and, above all, talent. The boundaries between these factors are often rather blurred and their relative importance varied between individuals.

In the New Zealand military forces, unlike in the British Army, social position and contacts with influential individuals and groups did not play a significant part in the promotion of particular officers.⁴ In assessing Hart’s First World War career it is, however, important to recognise that as a well-educated, European, Protestant man of above average height with a high-status occupation he was a prime example of the kind of individual who dominated the ranks of the NZEF’s officer corps and those of other

1 See for example, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1927, 8, 5 March 1928, 14.

2 *Collins English Dictionary*, accessed 22 May 2019.

3 John Crawford, ed., *The Devil’s Own War: The First World War Diary of Brigadier-General Herbert Hart* (Auckland: Exisle, 2008), 17–21.

4 Keith Simpson, ‘The officers’, in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, eds. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 75–83; Peter Cooke and John Crawford, *The Territorials: The History of the Territorial and Volunteer Forces of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random House, 2011), 163–165, 193–194.



Figure 1. Herbert Hart inspecting a unit of the 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, France, 6 July 1917. Alexander Turnbull Library. RSA Collection, 1/2-012830-G.

similar Allied forces.⁵ It is also worth noting that Hart's career may have been rather different had he been a British Territorial officer as he would have had to contend with a pervasive prejudice amongst British regular army officers against citizen soldiers being given senior rank.⁶ Although such qualities were by no means a pre-requisite for advancement or success during the First World War, it is worth observing that Hart was a charming, likeable man who possessed considerable charisma.⁷

OPPORTUNITY

The massive expansion of the armies of the combatant nations following the outbreak of war in 1914 provided great opportunities for advancement. As in other armies, men who began their service in the NZEF as

officers were best positioned to take advantage of these opportunities.⁸ During the war heavy casualties amongst officers provided further opportunities for the survivors to rise up the military hierarchy.⁹ Active service also provided capable individuals with more situations in which they could display their talents.

In 1914 Hart was a young and comparatively junior major in the New Zealand Territorial Force. After he volunteered for service in the NZEF he was made second-in-command of the Wellington Infantry Battalion. Second-in-command of an infantry battalion was the best post a man of Hart's rank and experience could hope for. The commander of the Wellington Infantry Battalion was Lieutenant-Colonel William Malone, the best battalion commander in the NZEF during the first year of the war. Malone thought highly of Hart, who was fortunate

5 Crawford, *Devil's War*, 17–21; Peter D. Hodge, 'The Army of Opportunity? Social and Military Backgrounds of NZEF Officers in the Great War, 1914–1918' (BA Honours Research Essay, Victoria University of Wellington, 1994), 24–38; William Westerman, 'Change and Continuity in Combat: A Statistical Analysis of the Officers of the 5th Australian Infantry Battalion, 1914 to 1918', *First World War Studies* (2019): 10–11, accessed 21 April 2019; Dale James Blair, 'An Australian "Officer-Type"? – A Demographic Study of the Composition of Officers in the 1st Battalion, First AIF', *Sabertache XXXIX* (March 1998): 21–27; Jean Bou and Peter Dennis with Paul Dagleish, *The Australian Imperial Force*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2016), 59–60.

6 Ian Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', *A Nation in Arms*, 140–143.

7 *Devil's War*, 296–298.

8 Bou and Dennis, *AIF*, 55–57.

9 Simpson, 'The Officers', *A Nation in Arms*, 69, 86–87.

to serve under such a capable officer.¹⁰ Malone's death during the heroic defence of Chunuk Bair in August 1915 left the way open for Hart to take command of the Wellington Battalion the following month.¹¹

LUCK

There is no doubt that in order to have a good war an individual required more than their fair share of luck. On 27 April 1915 Hart was shot in the hip while playing a key role in the defence of Walker's Ridge, a vital position overlooking Anzac Cove. The resulting wound was large, but did not fracture his hip, something that would have been very dangerous and which easily could have terminated his military career, if not his life.¹² Hart survived his brush with death on Walker's Ridge as he did other close calls during the war.¹³ Many other talented New Zealand officers, such as lieutenant-colonels William Malone and George King were not so lucky.¹⁴ The wound Hart sustained during the initial fighting at Gallipoli took months to heal, which meant he missed the virtual destruction of the Wellington Infantry Battalion on Chunuk Bair in August 1915.¹⁵

COURAGE

Officers were expected to be brave both by the men they commanded and their superiors. An officer who lacked this highly valued quality was unlikely to be promoted.¹⁶ At Gallipoli, and later on the western front, Hart repeatedly demonstrated his personal bravery. During the initial fighting at Gallipoli, for instance, he showed 'gallantry and devotion to duty ... in rallying men and digging into an important forward position in the face of an extremely severe fire'.¹⁷

RESILIENCE

In order to have a good war both officers and other ranks needed to be resilient, physically and mentally. Hart was young, physically fit, and strong. The serious wound Hart suffered at Gallipoli does not appear to have had any long-term impact on his health.¹⁸ In general, Hart's health was good, and unlike a significant number of officers he was rarely unfit for active service.¹⁹

Hart's physical resilience was complemented by a mental resilience which enabled him to withstand the stresses and strains of active service in the Great War. Like most soldiers who saw a considerable amount of action, Hart developed a number of coping or survival strategies; including a sometimes rather black sense of humour that helped many soldiers through the First World War.²⁰ After he was badly wounded at Gallipoli, for instance, Hart, who was a keen cyclist, told his wife in a telegram that he had been shot, remarking that he had a: 'Double puncture; being vulcanised; well soon'.²¹ He was also an optimist who had a great ability to take advantage of any opportunities for pleasure or relaxation and, it seems, an ability to at least temporarily put the worries of command to one side.²² Perhaps most importantly, as was very common, he became a fatalist. On the eve of the New Zealand Division's commitment to the bloody Somme offensive, for instance, he wrote that 'what is to be will be, and I think we are all fatalists long before this'.²³ Hart was not a 'war lover' or 'fire eater'. He was painfully aware of the ever-increasing number of his old comrades and friends who had died. After noting the death of an old friend in May 1918, for example, he was moved to write that: 'One by one they pass and are no more'.²⁴ In his detailed diary he regularly expressed his disgust at the destruction and misery caused by what

- 10 13 August 1914 and 27 April 1915 diary entries, John Crawford with Peter Cooke eds., *No Better Death: The Great War Diaries and Letters of William G. Malone*, 2nd ed. (Auckland: Exisle, 2014), 41, 166; Christopher Pugsley, *Gallipoli: The New Zealand Story* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 18, 237–239.
- 11 19 August 1915, 6 September 1915 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 71, 73–74.
- 12 27 April 1915 diary entry, *ibid.*, 60–61.
- 13 8 July and 16 September 1916 diary entries, *ibid.*, 122, 141–142.
- 14 *Patea Mail*, 7 May 1917, 2; Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand's Western Front Campaign* (Auckland: David Bateman, 2016), 139.
- 15 5 August 1915 diary entry, *Devil's War*, 70.
- 16 Terry Kinloch, *Godley: The Man Behind the Myth* (Dunedin: Exisle, 2018), 177; William Westerman, *Soldiers and Gentlemen: Australian Battalion Commanders in the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 157–58; Frank Davies and Graham Maddocks, *Bloody Red Tabs: General Officer Casualties of the Great War, 1914–1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995), 22–24, 48–50.
- 17 Herbert Hart DSO citation, J. Bryant Haigh and A.J. Polaschek, *New Zealand and the Distinguished Service Order* (the authors: Christchurch, 1993), 16–18 September 1916 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 64, 141–143.
- 18 27 April–23 June 1915 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 60–64; Casualty Form-Active Service and related papers, Herbert Ernest Hart, No. 10/133, military personal file, R24044567, Archives New Zealand Wellington (ANZ).
- 19 14–31 December, 18 February–11 March 1918 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 155–158, 223–227.
- 20 Alex Watson, 'Self-deception and Survival: Mental Coping Strategies on the Western Front, 1914–18', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, no. 2 (April 2006): 247–268; 20 July 1916, 22 September 1916, *Devil's War*, 125–126, 143–144.
- 21 *Daily News*, Carterton, 3 May 1915, clipping in MSZ-0661, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).
- 22 9 July 1916 and 2 February 1918 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 12223, 219; S.J.E. Closey ed., *Fourthoughts: Being the Journal of the War New Zealand Infantry Brigade Group* (London: Argus Printing, 1918), 113.
- 23 5 September 1916 diary entry, *Devil's War*, 137.
- 24 3 May 1918 diary entry, *ibid.*, 232.

he once called 'the devil's own war'.²⁵ Hart, like other soldiers, had to harden his heart in order that he might continue to effectively perform his duties.²⁶

TALENT

The final good war factor is talent. The factors discussed above either singularly or collectively would not have led to Hart's rapid advancement if they had not been combined with considerable ability. Before the First World War he had been recognised as a 'good officer, keen and enthusiastic'.²⁷ During the war regular confidential reports were prepared by commanding officers on the performance of officers under their command. Unfortunately, comparatively few of these reports have survived and none of these relate to Hart.²⁸ At Gallipoli, Hart's exceptional performance during the defence of Walker's Ridge was recognised when he was made a member of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). Only one other NZEF officer was so honoured for their service during the opening days of the Gallipoli campaign.²⁹ Hart's conduct and performance in 1915 and 1916 impressed senior NZEF officers. During September 1916, on the Somme, as commander of the 1st Battalion of the Wellington Regiment Hart demonstrated outstanding leadership combined with an ability to make quick, sound decisions in action.³⁰

HART BECOMES A BRIGADE COMMANDER

These good war factors or traits are all important to Hart's career during the crucial and grim year of 1917. By the end of 1916 Hart had established himself as one of the New Zealand Division's best battalion commanders. For a week in late October 1916, Hart was for the first time given the temporary command of his brigade.³¹ For all of January 1917, Hart was the temporary commander of the

3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Brigade.³² He made the most of these opportunities and showed himself to be capable of commanding a brigade. An infantry brigade, which at full strength consisted of over 4,000 men, was the smallest formation in the British and Dominion forces during the First World War. Its main units were four infantry battalions. Brigades had a crucial role in operations. Normally an infantry division had three brigades.³³

Early in February 1917, however, he was informed by Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, the commander of the New Zealand Division that he would not become the new permanent commander of the 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade. This post went to a regular officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Brown. Russell apparently would have preferred to appoint Hart, but was overruled by the commander of the NZEF, Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Godley. Hart was, however, assured by Russell that he would receive the next vacant brigade command.³⁴

Hart's opportunity came sooner than it would otherwise have done because of the New Zealand government's decision in February 1917 to form an additional infantry brigade. As promised, Hart, who Godley described as 'a capital New Zealand citizen soldier', was promoted to brigadier-general and was placed in command of this new, 4th Infantry Brigade. This was a major advance for Hart as there were 47 lieutenant-colonels on the strength of the NZEF in 1917, but only six brigadier-generals.³⁵ This promotion, therefore, elevated Hart into a much more select company.

THE ADVANTAGE AND IMPLICATIONS OF BECOMING A BRIGADIER-GENERAL

Promotion to the rank of brigadier-general substantially changed Hart's experience of warfare on the western front. Regular periods of leave were vital to maintaining

25 4-7 February 1917 and 14 December 1916 diary entries, *ibid.*, 164, 156.

26 7 March 1917, 5 September 1918 diary entries, *Devil's Own War*, 172, 251; *Wairarapa Age*, 17 September 1918, 5; Simon Robbins, *British Generalship during the Great War; The Military Career of Sir Henry Horne 1861-1929* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 267-268.

27 Confidential Reports on Territorial Force Units 1912 [1911]-1913, 345, AD37, 21/26, ANZ.

28 See for example, Confidential Reports on Officers of Infantry Second Reinforcements, Trentham Camp, 20 November 1914, AD10, 42/3, R3885592, ANZ.

29 *Devil's War*, 64.

30 27 April 1915 diary entry, Malone to Ida, 3 July 1915, *No Better Death*, 166, 260; 16-27 September 1916, *Devil's War*, 141-146; H. Stewart, *The New Zealand Division 1916-1919: A Popular History Based on Official Records* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1921), 106, 163.

31 22-29 October 1916 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 148-149.

32 *Devil's War*, 156, 158-163; Stewart, *New Zealand Division*, 106, 163.

33 Peter Simkins, "'Building Blocks': Aspects of Command and Control at Brigade Level in the BEF's Offensive Operations, 1916-1918", in *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918*, eds. Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004), 141-171.

34 2 February 1917 diary entry, *Devil's War*, 163, Andrew Russell diary entry 1 February 1917 (copy), R.F. Gambrill, 'The Russell Family Saga, Vol. 3', QMS-0822, ATL.

35 Godley to Wigram, 10 March 1917, WA 252/14, R24048337, ANZ; *NZEF Gradation List January 1917* (Wellington?: NZEF, 1917); John Crawford, 'New Zealand is Being Bled to Death: The Formation, Operations and Disbandment of the Fourth Brigade' in *New Zealand's Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, eds. John Crawford and Ian McGibbon (Auckland: Exisle, 2007), 250-253.

the physical and mental well-being of soldiers. On average a New Zealand soldier serving on the western front could expect an eight-day period of leave in the United Kingdom plus travel days about every 18 months.³⁶ Senior officers like Herbert Hart benefited from a more liberal leave regime. In 1917 Hart had three periods of leave in the United Kingdom, totalling 21 days.³⁷ He also spent two and a half months in England forming and training his brigade.³⁸ As a brigadier-general with some resources Hart was able to arrange for his wife, Minnie, to travel to the United Kingdom during 1917 for a visit that lasted for more than a year. Consequently, Minnie was able in February 1918 to visit Hart in hospital in France after he had been gassed.³⁹ Her presence in England, which fortuitously overlapped with the time Hart was posted there raising his new brigade, was a boost to his morale. After her departure Hart wrote: 'the sunshine has gone out of my life and am greatly worried and depressed'.⁴⁰

Brigade headquarters were located further behind the front line than battalion headquarters and generally the accommodation was somewhat more comfortable. This combination of more leave and better accommodation fostered resilience amongst more senior officers.⁴¹ This was just as well because the stress of command and very long working hours undoubtedly took their toll on senior officers. Officers in general and senior personnel in particular were a valuable commodity and as such the military system took particular care of them. By the end of 1916, for example, Hart was rather rundown and unwell after a year of hard service. He was then sent for the Christmas-New Year period to a 'very cosy' Château that was being run as a convalescent home for officers.⁴²

Becoming a brigade commander not only increased the physical distance between Hart and front line troops, but also the psychological distance between him and the men he commanded. This is perhaps best illustrated by Hart's account in his diary of the first trench raid he oversaw as a brigade commander:

I found it much less trying being connected with a raid as Brigadier than as Battalion Commander. In the present case my position more closely resembled the picture of a General during an engagement as depicted by popular magazines. As zero time—5 o'clock—drew near, I entered the Brigade office where a direct telephone wire had been run to the Artillery Group covering the sector and also to the Battalion Commander directing the raid. On a table in the office was spread out a large map and aeroplane photos of the part being raided, also the operation orders, timetable and a watch. The Brigade Major [the principal staff officer in a brigade] sat on one side and the Commander of the Artillery Group on the other.⁴³

This account is an interesting contrast with Hart's depiction of the raid in July 1916 which he directed as a battalion commander. In this operation, his closest friend in the NZEF, Captain Alexander McColl, was killed. Hart felt partially responsible for McColl's death and never became so closely attached to any of his subordinates during the rest of the war.⁴⁴

Promotion to the rank of brigadier-general also markedly changed Hart's material and social circumstances. His pay almost doubled to more than £1,000 a year.⁴⁵ This was significantly more than the heads of major public service departments in New Zealand who received on average between £800 and £900 per annum.⁴⁶ As a brigadier-general he met and occasionally socialised with senior generals, politicians, and even members of the royal family⁴⁷ (Fig. 2).

HART AS A BRIGADE COMMANDER: 1917–1918

Hart's 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade had a support role during the Battle of Messines in June 1917. It carried out its first, and as it transpired, only major assault on 4 October 1917 as part of the Battle of Passchendaele. The planning and the preparations for this attack were

36 Glyn Harper, *Johnny Enzed: The New Zealand Soldier in the First World War 1914–1918* (Auckland: Exisle, 2015), 386.

37 Calculated from Hart's diary entries (31 May–8 June 1916, 8 days, 8 November–21 November 1916, 13 days, 13–18 March 1917, 5 days, 11 September–16 September, 5 days, 20 December 1917–6 January 1918, 11 days; and see 5 March 1917, *Devil's War*, 169.

38 11 March to 28 May 1917 diary entries, *ibid.*, 172–178.

39 23 March 1917, 26 February 1918, 18 May 1918, 30 May 1918 diary entries, *ibid.*, 173, 225, 235, 236.

40 1 June 1918 diary entry, *ibid.*, 236.

41 See for example 4 November 1917 diary entry, *ibid.*, 207; Simkins, 'Building Blocks', 141–171; Westerman, *Soldiers and Gentlemen*, 120–124.

42 14–29 December 1916 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 155–158.

43 7 January 1917 diary entry, *ibid.*, 159.

44 1 July 1916 diary entry, *ibid.*, 119–121.

45 New Zealand Defence Forces, 'Pay and Allowances New Zealand Expeditionary Force', Special General Order 230/1917, 23 May 1917, AD1, 31/419, R22433941, ANZ; Copus to War Office, 10 March 1916, AD1, 31/900, R22431509, ANZ.

46 *Supplement to New Zealand Gazette*, 28 April 1917. 'List of persons employed in the public service on 31 March 1917', 1637, 1653, 1677, 1723, 1731.

47 29 December 1916, 1 May 1917, 25 June 1917, 30 June–1 July 1917, *Devil's War*, 157, 176, 187.



Figure 2. The Prince of Wales and Hart's staff on 18 January 1919 outside of the Rifles Brigade's headquarters, Mielenforst Château, near Cologne. The Prince is in the centre with Hart to the right, on the lowest step. Alexander Turnbull Library. RSA Collection, 1/1-002093-G.

meticulous. In a classic 'bite and hold' operation the 1st and 4th Brigades seized all their objectives. Eight days later the other two infantry brigades of the New Zealand Division suffered terrible losses in a disastrous attack that ended in abject failure. This failure was in no way due to a lack of commitment or ability by the assault troops or the commanders but, as Hart recognised, was due to a combination of factors which included poor high-level planning, terrible weather and ground conditions and inadequate artillery support. Hart was fortunate that his brigade was not selected to take part in this doomed assault.⁴⁸

Hart was also lucky to escape being wounded or killed during 1917. Charles Brown, who was given command of the 1st Infantry Brigade ahead of Hart, was not so fortunate. After only four months in command he was killed in action at Messines.⁴⁹ More than 200 British and Dominion generals were killed or wounded during

the Great War⁵⁰ (Fig. 3) Hart's resilience was evident during this crucial year in his career. He suffered no serious health problems during 1917 and was virtually always fit for active service.⁵¹

The highly successful way Hart went about raising and leading his new brigade confirmed that he was indeed a talented officer. In February 1918, the 4th Brigade was disbanded as part of the reorganisation of the New Zealand Division. Hart was transferred to command the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade.⁵² Two weeks after taking up the appointment his headquarters, which was located in a large dugout, was heavily bombarded with high explosive and gas shells. The gas-proof doors of the dugout failed, and Hart and most of his staff were overcome. Hart was temporarily blinded and spent nearly a month in hospital. He then went to a rather luxurious officers' rest home in the south of France. In April 1918, Hart took over command of the New Zealand training

48 3 October–13 October 1917, *ibid.*, 199–205; Ian McGibbon, *Western Front*, 124–145.

49 Stewart, *New Zealand Division*, 207.

50 Davies and Maddocks, *Red Tabs*, xi–xii, 50, 62–63, 78.

51 5 July 1917, 1 December 1917 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 188, 212; Crawford, 'Fourth Brigade', 263–265.

52 27 January and 4 February 1918 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 219, 221.

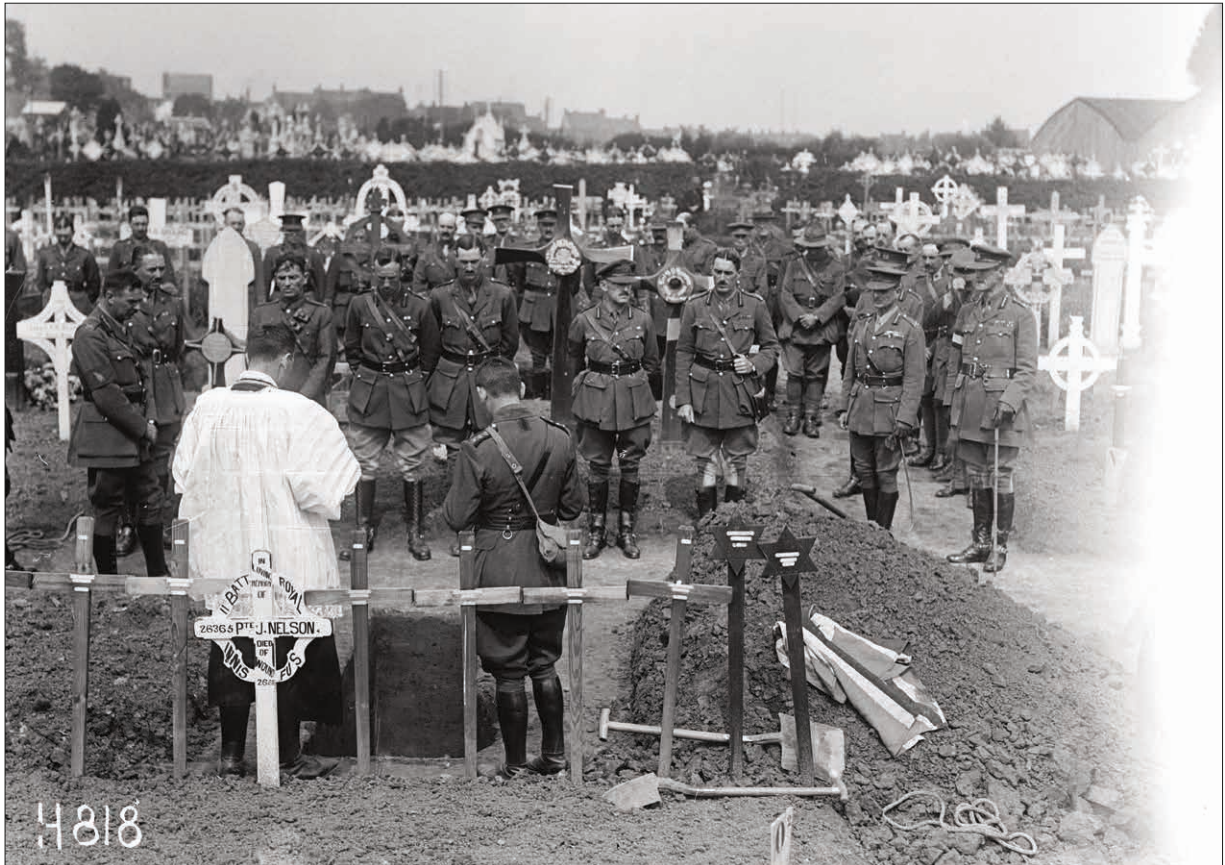


Figure 3. The funeral of Brigadier-General Charles Brown, 9 June 1917. From right to left: Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Godley, Lieutenant-General Sir William Birdwood, Brigadier-General Herbert Hart, Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Cook. The soldier standing third from the left is almost certainly one of Brown's sons. His other son is probably one of the unidentified officers. Alexander Turnbull Library. RSA Collection, 1/2-013402-G.

and depot units in England.⁵³ In mid-July, he was urgently dispatched to France to take over command of the 3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Brigade after its commander was wounded. For the next four months he led the brigade during the great Allied offensives that ended the war. At the beginning of November 1918, in the New Zealand Division's last and perhaps most spectacular operation, his brigade captured the walled town of Le Quesnoy. This action helped ensure that Herbert Hart was one of the best known senior New Zealand officers by the end of the Great War.⁵⁴

POST-WAR LIFE

Hart had to remain in Europe on duty for a considerable period after the end of the war and did not return home

until Anzac Day 1919. Hart's increasingly illustrious career in the NZEF had attracted considerable interest in New Zealand, but above all in Wairarapa.⁵⁵ When he returned to his hometown of Carterton he received a tremendous welcome (Fig. 4). A large crowd carried him shoulder high from the railway station to his home.

A few days later, Hart was presented with an illuminated address signed by many of the Wairarapa's leading citizens. It extolled his qualities and achievements and wished him success and happiness in the future. This address along with the decorations he received for his war service, CB, CMG, DSO, Croix de Guerre, and being mentioned in dispatches on five occasions, are potent symbols of having had a good war.⁵⁶

Less than a month after returning to New Zealand Herbert Hart resumed his legal practice in Carterton. A

53 18 February to 12 April 1918 diary entries, *Devil's War*, 223–231; Stewart, *The New Zealand Division*, 323.

54 16 July to 11 November 1918, *Devil's War*, 240–269; Stewart, *The New Zealand Division*, 395, 593; *Poverty Bay Herald*, 11 January 1919, 9; *New Zealand Herald*, 13 January 1919, 6; Christopher Pugsley, *Le Quesnoy: New Zealand's Last Battle 1918* (Auckland: Oratia, 2018).

55 *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 7 April 1917, 4; 4 May 1917, 3; *Thames Star*, 12 May 1917, 6.

56 Illuminated Address presented to Herbert Hart, MSY-3872, ATL; *Devil's War*, 285–288. Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (CB), Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (CMG), Distinguished Service Order (DSO).



Figure 4. The crowd gathered at the Carterton railway station to welcome home Brigadier-General Herbert Hart, Anzac Day 1919. Alexander Turnbull Library. MSY-3872_023.

few months later he and his family moved to Masterton, the major centre of Wairarapa, and established a new law firm with offices in both Masterton and Carterton.⁵⁷ He was in a sound financial position and became involved in local business and farming enterprises. Hart also had a prominent role in many community organisations; including being an important early leader in the Rotary movement. In short, he had a much higher public profile than before the war. Hart was also one of the most senior officers in the Territorial Force until his retirement in 1925.⁵⁸ During the 1920s he lived and practised law in Wairarapa.⁵⁹ Unlike some other former NZEF officers who had good wars, Hart never entered national politics, although it was rumoured that he had been asked to do so. There was, as one Wairarapa newspaper commented in 1919, a widely held view that: ‘Men who have distinguished themselves on the field of battle, and have shown themselves leaders of men, should make capable representatives of the people in the highest court of the land’.⁶⁰

In 1929, the Minister of Defence suggested to Hart that he apply to become head of the administration in Samoa, New Zealand’s League of Nations mandated territory. The key requirements for this post were thought to be a strong personality and administrative experience. Weakness, indecision, and ill-health were seen as absolutely disqualifying candidates.⁶¹ In his successful application for this significant and well-remunerated post, Hart emphasised his wide military and civilian experience.

He also stressed his dealings with Māori in Wairarapa and indigenous people in South Africa and Egypt.⁶²

His tenure as administrator in Samoa (Fig 5) between 1931 and 1935 was regarded as a success by the government and Hart was knighted for his services. The following year, on the recommendation of the New Zealand government, Hart was appointed to head the Imperial War Graves Commission’s operations in the Middle East. In addition, between 1940 and 1942 Hart, as an unpaid acting brigadier, organised and ran the British Army’s grave service in the Middle East. Hart made a success of both these demanding roles. He retired and returned to New Zealand in 1943. At the time of his death in 1968 Hart was the last surviving senior NZEF officer. He was buried with full military honours in Masterton.⁶³

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Herbert Hart was a capable, intelligent man with a winning personality. If it were not for the First World War he would probably have been a successful provincial lawyer and a senior citizen soldier in New Zealand’s Territorial Force. The Great War provided Hart with opportunities to display his considerable talent and this combined with luck, courage, and mental and physical resilience ensured that he had a good war. Hart’s wartime military career widened his horizons and changed the trajectory of his life. He became a well-known and respected figure

⁵⁷ *Devil’s War*, 286–287.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 287–92; *Wairarapa Age*, 3 May 1919, 3; 16 September 1919, 5; 20 September 1919, 5; 22 November 1919, 5; *Evening Post*, 5 November 1920, 4; 3 May 1924, 9; 5 June 1924, 6; 6 June 1924, 7.

⁵⁹ *Devil’s War*, 289–290.

⁶⁰ *Wairarapa Age*, 22 July 1919, 4.

⁶¹ Berendsen to Minister of External Affairs, 12 February 1931, IT1, EX89/23, R17963143, ANZ.

⁶² Hart to Prime Minister, 5 May 1930, IT1, EX89/23, R17963143, ANZ.

⁶³ *Devil’s War*, 290–296.



Figure 5. The Governor-General of New Zealand Lord Bledisloe and Lady Bledisloe in Apia, Samoa, April 1933. Herbert Hart is second from the right next to Lady Bledisloe and his wife, Minnie Hart, is to the left of Lord Bledisloe. Alexander Turnbull Library. PACOLL-3062-1-04.

after the war in Wairarapa and nationally. This status, which flowed directly from wartime service, led to his appointment to important positions by the New Zealand government and the Imperial War Graves Commission.

Brigadier-General Sir Herbert Hart is an excellent example of the class of men who had a good war, went on to have a good peace, and who played a significant part in shaping the post-war world.

John Crawford is the New Zealand Defence Force Historian and has written on many aspects of the history of the New Zealand Armed Forces and defence policy. Currently he is working on a book about New Zealand's campaigns against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. His major publications include: *The Territorials: The history of the Territorial and Volunteer Forces of New Zealand*, co-authored with Peter Cooke (2011); *The Devil's Own War: The First World War Diary of Brigadier-General Herbert Hart* (2008); *New Zealand's Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, co-edited with Ian McGibbon (2007), *To Fight for the Empire: An Illustrated History of New Zealand and the South African War, 1899–1902* (1999) and *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War* (2000). john.crawford@nzdf.mil.nz

