New Zealand war correspondence before 1915

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Abstract

Little research has been published on New Zealand war correspondence but an assertion has been made in a reputable military book that the country has not established a strong tradition in this genre. To test this claim, the author has made a preliminary examination of war correspondence prior to 1915 to throw some light on its early development. In the years before the appointment of the country’s official war correspondent in 1915, New Zealand newspapers clearly saw the importance of reporting on war, whether within the country or abroad and not always when it involved New Zealand troops. Despite the great cost in some instances, journalists were sent around the country to cover the New Zealand Wars, and to Samoa, South Africa and China for other conflicts that New Zealand had an interest in. Two types of war correspondent are observable in those early years – the soldier journalist and the ordinary independent journalist plucked from his newsroom or free lance contract to cover armed conflict. In both cases one could call them amateur war correspondents.
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Introduction

This paper is a brief introduction to the New Zealand war correspondence prior to World War I and would be a good topic for further in-depth study. The desire has been to explore the suggestion that New Zealand has not established a strong tradition of war correspondence, made in *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history* (McGibbon, 2000, p. 578). It claimed most war reporting had been sponsored by the state and that New Zealand war correspondents had been noted “for their journalistic competence rather than for literary talent”. The book devoted a mere 20 lines to New Zealand war correspondence prior to World War I. It seemed appropriate seeing the author’s major study was Malcolm Ross, the country’s first official war correspondent in World War I, to try and discover whether there was any sort of tradition of war correspondence before his appointment and to test *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history*’s assertion. A preliminary investigation seems to show that newspapers did show some enterprise in independently sending journalists to various conflicts in an endeavour to provide readers with an appreciation of events through the eyes of New Zealanders. Despite the great cost in some instances, men were sent around the country to cover the New Zealand Wars, and to Samoa, South Africa and China for other conflicts that New Zealand had an interest in. Newspapers were not just concerned about covering wars which involved the country’s own soldiers. They sent journalists to cover the turbulent events in Samoa in 1899 and in China in 1901. Newspapers often joined together to send a journalist overseas – one way of offsetting costs. More is known about the joint efforts of *The Press*, the *Otago Daily Times*, *Evening Post* and the *NZ Herald* in this regard, but future research will surely show that other big papers of the pre-war years such as the *Auckland Star*, and the *New Zealand Times* also employed men to act as war correspondents at various theatres of war.
The New Zealand Wars

Not much is known about New Zealand journalists’ views on war correspondence but there was one indication to be found in a leading article of Dunedin’s *Otago Daily Times* on August 28, 1900 under the heading *War correspondents*. The leader noted that war correspondents at the turn of the century were now regarded as a “necessary adjunct to a modern newspaper” but it was rather dismissive of the need to cover the conflict between Maori and white settlers.

In the early days, when war was waged in various parts of the North Island against the Maori, there were little or no opportunities for the war correspondent and recent enterprising journals in this colony devoted more attention to exploration and the opening up of new country for settlement than to warlike subjects. From time to time representatives of this journal have headed or taken part in many such expeditions (Anonymous, 1900d).

For New Zealand’s oldest daily newspaper, the New Zealand Wars must have slipped its memory if it could consider the Parihaka campaign of 1881 as “the first real opportunity afforded in this colony to the war correspondent”.  Edward T. Fricker represented the *Otago Daily Times* on that occasion.  Of course, there were several northern journalists who covered the New Zealand Wars. A notable one was William Morgan, who worked out of Drury and sent reports to the *Daily Southern Cross* and occasionally the London *Weekly Review*, over a period of about six months (Morris, 1963, p. 7). He is not mentioned in *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history*. As a young man Morgan began a journal a few days after leaving England in 1852. This journal forms the basis of the many published

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1 The article could have mentioned that its own journalist, Malcolm Ross, was one such representative.

2 Maori of the Parihaka community in south Taranaki, and lead by Te Whiti, started a campaign of ploughing up land settled by Pakeha and protest ensued. The Government continued to survey the land and tensions between settlers and Maori grew. Te Whiti urged peaceful resistance. But in November 1881 an armed Government force of more than 1500 invaded Parihaka. They faced about 2,000 seated Maori (Keenan, 1993).

3 Ross himself was to visit Parihaka in 1906 and interview Te Whiti - a year before the latter’s death (Anonymous, 1906).

4 Fricker was on the staff of the *Otago Daily Times* when Ross joined (Anonymous, 1880-1882) and left for Australia to work on the Melbourne *Argus*, about the same time as Ross left, in 1889 (Anonymous, 1889d; Hutchison, n.d.).
accounts he wrote during the war in the Franklin area from July 1863. His
despatches were often published in other New Zealand newspapers. The
Daily Southern Cross had other correspondents writing about the war, such as Charles
Williamson. He covered the Waikato and Tauranga campaigns for the paper often
with H. Willoughby, the special correspondent representing the Melbourne Argus
(Anonymous, 1883b). As well, the editor, Robert James Creighton, spent some time
in the field as a correspondent, according to Guy Scholefield (Scholefield, 1958, p.
78). The opposition paper in Auckland, The New Zealander, also fielded a war
correspondent, albeit a volunteer one, John Sheehan, who later became Minister of
Native Affairs (Anonymous, 1878e). None of these men were mentioned in The
Oxford companion to New Zealand military history.

Others that were cited by The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history
included G.W. Woon, the owner of the Taranaki Herald, who the editor believed
could lay claim to the title of New Zealand's first war correspondent. “As a member
of a volunteer unit, he produced a journal of events based on the fighting in
Taranaki from 1860 to 1861” (Anonymous, 2000, p. 578). Guy Scholefield
recorded that Woon served his apprenticeship in the New Zealander’s Wellington
office before heading for Taranaki to become the nominal editor of the Taranaki
Herald. He bought the paper in 1854 and was the editor for most of the time from
then to 1867 (Scholefield, 1958, pp. 129-131). The regular Journal of events he
published from 1860 at the commencement of the Waitara conflict was seen by
Scholefield as a “valuable source for the history of that period”, since Woon was a
member of the Rifle Volunteers “and knew what was passing”. Other
correspondents to cover the New Zealand Wars, says The Oxford companion to

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5 He returned to his old trade of compositor in 1864 but took up the writer’s pen again in 1866 with
a series of letters entitled Hints to bush farmers for the Auckland Weekly News. He became its
agricultural correspondent in 1876 under the pseudonym, Agricola, and remained so until early June
1903 when his services were dispensed with. He was 76 when he died on June 25 (Morris, 1963, pp.
119-120).

6 The first issue came out on August 4, 1852. On page 2 is listed the marriage of G. W. Woon to Ann
George on July 28.

7 The NZ Army List notes Woon as an ensign in the Taranaki militia, July 27, 1863.
New Zealand military history, were W.D. Campbell (*Lyttelton Times*)\(^8\), Gustavus von Tempsky (*Daily Southern Cross*) and John Featon, who published a history of the Waikato campaign in 1879 (Featon, 1879). One could also point to Charles Otto Montrose who made his mark with letters from the front when he was a foot soldier with one of the regiments of the line during the wars. He later became the sub editor of the *Auckland Star* under T. W. Leys (Anonymous, 1907d). There are probably other men (and they were almost always men) as yet unresearched who covered the wars. A common feature of war correspondence of the time appeared to be journalists combining their newspaper work with their own military activity. That is certainly true of Woon, von Tempsky and Montrose. So for *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history* to claim Woon as the country’s first war correspondent is probably premature considering so little research has been carried out on the subject.

**Other inspirations prior to 1899**

Many New Zealanders in the late 19\(^{th}\) century were inspired by the exploits of renowned war correspondents from Britain and elsewhere. Before the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s, William Russell, of *The Times*, with his despatches from the Crimean War (1853-1856) (Russell, 1855), was highly regarded. Later, such journalists as Archibald Forbes, who covered the Franco-Prussian War, in the early 1870s and the Russo-Turkish campaign of 1877 (Anonymous, 1904; Lovelace, 1978; Ward, 1907-1921) and Bennett Burleigh of the Glasgow *Daily Mail* were published widely back in New Zealand. As well the country was often visited by war correspondents on lecture tours. Probably the most eagerly awaited was Forbes, who was to have arrived in the country in May, 1881 but did not on account of poor health (Anonymous, 1881). Local newspapers followed the fortunes of overseas war correspondents with particular avidity, and no one more so than Forbes. The papers had recorded Forbes receiving the Iron Cross (Anonymous, 1871) and being able to ride on horseback all day to follow the fighting and then write all night to get his despatch away (Anonymous, 1877). *The Evening Post* had even gone to the

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\(^8\) Scholefield noted that Campbell went on to become editor of *The Timaru Post* (1900-01) and *The Timaru Herald* (1904-08) (Scholefield, 1958, pp. 234-236).
extraordinary lengths of publishing two stories about Forbes on its front page only a
week apart in January 1878, the second story being 2500 words long (Anonymous,
1878a, 1878c). Even the *North Otago Times* ran an enthusiastic piece of 850 words
on the journalist in April of that year (Anonymous, 1878d). Apparently the papers
couldn’t get enough of him and his exploits. They must have been bitterly
disappointed at his non arrival in 1881 but delighted when he finally turned up in
Invercargill to give his first lecture to a full house on November 28 the following
year (Anonymous, 1882). He slowly made his way up to the North Island but
seemed to have stepped on a few colonial toes in the process, if a long and
impassioned article in the *Otago Witness* of March 1883 was anything to go by
(Anonymous, 1883a). He left for Melbourne on March 27 (Anonymous, 1883c).
Suffice to say not much more was heard in the papers about Mr Forbes.

Another war correspondent to visit was Howard Vincent, the special war
correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* with the British army in the Danube during
the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 (Anonymous, 1884). He toured the country in
October 1884. He was followed a year later by George Augustus Sala, of *The
Telegraph* (Anonymous, 1885a, 1887a, 1892; Hatton, 1885; Sala, 1885). Phil
Robinson, the war correspondent with the *Daily Chronicle* visited New Zealand in
1888 (Anonymous, 1888a, 1889b). He was extensively reported while in the
country (Anonymous, 1888a, 1888b) as was his very messy divorce late in May
1889 (Anonymous, 1889a, 1889b, 1889c). Next to make a speaking tour was David
Christie Murray, war correspondent of the London *Times* (Anonymous, 1890a,
1890b) followed by H. M. Stanley, war correspondent in Abyssinia and finder of
Livingstone (Anonymous, 1892). The final war correspondent of note to tour the
country prior to the Samoan troubles and the South African War in 1895 was
Frederic Villiers, the veteran correspondent of the *Standard* who witnessed the
taking of Khartoum 10 years earlier (Anonymous, 1888a, 1895).

New Zealand newspapers seemed particularly interested in the dangers
 correspondents faced in the execution of their assignments. They ran stories of
arrests, expulsions and deaths of correspondents on overseas battlefields. The

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9 And later the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He was arrested as a spy by the Spanish in Havana in 1898.
Otago Witness, for example, ran a story from the New York Herald about its war correspondents being captured and tried as spies during the American civil war (Anonymous, 1863). In 1870 the Evening Post carried a story about a special reporter for the Standard being detained and then released on the orders of Napoleon (Anonymous, 1870b) and then followed this a short time later with a similar story of more arrests of correspondents (Anonymous, 1870a). If correspondents weren’t being arrested, for example in Cuba in 1898 (Anonymous, 1898c, 1898d) or dying while on assignment (Anonymous, 1888c, 1898a) they were being expelled from the seat of war (Anonymous, 1880). New Zealand newspapers then took the opportunity to lecture their readers on the risks these intrepid news hounds took to bring back information to the multitudes (Anonymous, 1897a) and to speculate on new methods of news gathering at the front, for example, The military typewriter on wheels (Anonymous, 1897b). It was clear if there was no war news to cover in New Zealand there was plenty to be got from abroad.

There was one curious anomaly that was revealed when examining local newspapers for information about war correspondents. On several occasions, papers were calling journalists war correspondents that covered local military events. For example, the North Otago Times sent a journalist off to cover an artillery competition between two rival artillery companies. The story was bylined “From our war correspondent” (Anonymous, 1878b). Likewise the Waikato Times reporter sent to cover a sham fight between Waikato and Auckland companies was billed as “Our own special war correspondent” (Anonymous, 1885b). The definition of a war correspondent being a person who covered war was being used to include covering military events of a peaceful nature.

The Samoan “troubles” 1899

The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history made no mention of the war correspondence conducted during this tumultuous period in Samoan history, but at least three journalists were sent to report on the conflict there. One of these was Malcolm Ross a freelance journalist writing for the Otago Daily Times and The Press
who, when Parliament was not in session, was free to choose his assignments. He asked to go to Samoa saying he estimated that costs would be well under £50. It was agreed that the Otago Daily Times would share the expenses of the correspondent with The Press and the Evening Post (Anonymous, 1895-1901). Why did Ross go to Samoa?

In the period 1873 to the mid 1890s, Samoan politics, as I. C. Campbell tells it, were a “confusing and chaotic process as settlers of different nationalities vied for pre-eminence” (Campbell, 1989, p. 99). European settlers, mainly British, German and American, sought land and influence and stirred up Samoan politics that were already riddled with inter-tribal strife. Even from 1875 when the first kingship was established, and Malietoa Laupepa became head of state, (Barclay, 1978, p. 114), unrest continued. Rivalries and jealousies amongst the European settlers saw Laupepa deposed and then reinstated as power seesawed from one group to another. The three major powers had signed treaties of friendship with Samoa from 1878-79, all keen to keep their trading privileges and other advantages, such as land, coaling stations and naval bases (A. Ross, 1964, p. 173). The Samoans were increasingly concerned about the instability being generated by the Europeans tussling over their country, especially from the German quarter, and appealed to Britain, New Zealand and the United States at various times to take them under their protection. Things came to a head in late 1898 when Laupepa died and a struggle over the succession between Mataafa and Laupepa's son, Tanumafili ensued (Barclay, 1978, p. 124) (Anonymous, 1899h). German interests supported the former and British and United States interests supported the latter.

**New Zealand interest in Samoa before 1899**

According to Angus Ross, New Zealanders, led by those crusading imperialists, Julius Vogel, Sir George Grey and Dick Seddon, saw Samoa as the most important group of islands in the whole Pacific (A. Ross, 1964, p. 175). “Grey, Vogel and others had already shown that they firmly believed that Samoa was just as important to New
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Zealand as New Guinea was to Australia.” 10 To this end from the 1870s on New Zealand tried to convince Britain to step in and offer protection to the tiny island nation and save it from the influence of other imperial powers, notably Germany and to a lesser extent, the United States (Barclay, 1978, p. 113). The interest was for commercial and strategic reasons. “A tradition of mixed commercial, political and romantic origins continued to inspire new Zealand politicians to demand the annexation of Samoa before all other groups in the Pacific” (A. Ross, 1964, p. 176). Despite repeated hammerings on the doors of Downing St and Whitehall, or “bleating, as Barclay called it (Barclay, 1978, p. 116), New Zealand got nowhere. “Slowly but surely the folly of continuing to press for the annexation of Samoa was being brought home to the New Zealand leaders it was clear Britain would not permit annexation (A. Ross, 1964, pp. 192-193). This did not stop New Zealand hankering after some role for itself in Samoa, but the inflated aspirations of New Zealand as a colonial power in the Pacific did not eventuate.

Ross was sent to Samoa because of New Zealand’s interest in the island nation but also, one suspects, because two other large New Zealand dailies, the NZ Herald and the Auckland Star, had sent or were about to send journalists to Apia. The NZ Herald reporter was Fred Carr Rollett and he was in Samoa when Ross arrived. Not much is known at this stage about Rollett. He was alluded to in Ross’s first dispatch. 11 The other journalist was James Cowan, acting for the Auckland Star, who like Ross “had a late look-in” to the Samoan situation (Anonymous, 1903). 12 Cowan, who was fluent in Maori, wrote several books, among them The Maoris of New Zealand, had several interesting connections with Ross. He accompanied Ross when Ross climbed Mt Ngauruhoe in 1907 but he also wrote a very highly regarded official military history of

10 They also had an interest in the Cook Islands and Niue. In 1888 New Zealand persuaded Britain to declare a protectorate over the islands. The colony provided the administrator and was allowed to annex the territory when it persuaded chiefs to petition for it, according to Ron Crocombe (Crocombe, 2001, p. 419). While Ross was in Samoa, Governor Ranfurly was making an official visit to the Cooks and the following year Britain ceded the administration of the islands to New Zealand (Crocombe, 1980).

11 Rollett returned to Auckland and in 1906 married fellow journalist Hilda Keane, when he was the agricultural editor of the Auckland Weekly News. He wrote a book on angling in New Zealand which was a guide to New Zealand trout fishing from 40 years experience in both the North and South Islands (Rollett, 1924). Considering Ross’s penchant for the outdoors, including angling, it is almost certain the two men were acquainted. They were of a similar age and died within a year of each other.

12 Cowan left the Auckland Star in 1906 to join the Tourist Department.
the New Zealand Wars (McGibbon, 2003). Ross had thought he was to write the official history of New Zealand’s involvement in World War I but this did not eventuate.

Ross’s first despatch was published on February 14, 1899 in summarised form in the *Evening Post*, and on the following day in the *Otago Daily Times* and *The Press* having been sent from Apia on February 8 on the steamer *Mariposa* to Auckland from whence it was then telegraphed to each subscribing paper (M. Ross, 1899c, 1899e). It took about five days for the steamer to get from Apia to Auckland, so the news was still fairly fresh when it arrived in New Zealand. This first batch of stories was run over the next few days. He apparently teamed up with Rollett to get some of the interviews with the main actors in the drama, from the German, British and American authorities to the Samoan chiefs on both sides of the conflict. *The Press* story ran to more than 10,000 words over six columns and was continued the next day with a further 5000 words and the following day with around 3500 words. By early May Ross is winding down his despatches as an armistice is declared (M. Ross, 1899a, 1899b, 1899d, 1899f, 1899g, 1899h). His final report from Samoa was published in the *Otago Daily Times* on May 20 and ran over two and a half columns or around 5500 words. It was not until November 10, 1899 that New Zealand heard by cable that the three commissioners had agreed on a settlement for Samoa. The “irrational outcome of this litany of failures”, as Steven Fischer called it, (Fischer, 2002, p. 145) was the division of Samoa into two separate legal entities: with Germany taking the western part of Samoa and the US taking the east (Anonymous, 1899c). New Zealand newspapers expressed their disappointment at partition but by now their attention had been diverted to another theatre of war – South Africa.

**The South African War 1899-1902**

With a second war looming between the Transvaal and Great Britain in 1899 George Fenwick of the *Otago Daily Times* was writing in July to the principals of the *NZ Herald, NZ Times* and *The Press* about the possibility of jointly sending a war correspondent to South Africa. Fenwick put forward as a candidate, Major D. M. Kennedy, who had spent four and a half years in South Africa. He estimated the cost for a correspondent for six months to be from £380-£400 (Fenwick, 1899-1902).

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13 Rollett and Cowan were running full despatches as well from Apia during the “troubles” and in fact, Rollett appeared to have stayed on after Ross had left.
Nobody was expecting the war, if it occurred, to last very long. The Auckland Star, in a leader on October 12, the day war was declared, said the Boers had to be “taught to know their proper position” and that it was “not anticipated that the campaign will be a lengthy one” (Anonymous, 1899a). The paper noted a day later that this was the first time Great Britain had gone to war with all her colonial representatives by her side. “In that sense the struggle is the first Imperial war” (Anonymous, 1899d). In an earlier article the Auckland Star leader writer, possibly editor T. W. Leys, hinted at what readers might be looking for from their correspondents at the “seat of war”.

When we take up the papers to read the war news it will be a minor matter how the fortune of battle has turned, compared with the least information as to how our boys have stood their ground. It will not be of General This or Major That we shall be most anxious to hear, but of names familiar to our mouths as household words - men of Auckland, Waikato, Coromandel and the rest (Anonymous, 1899g).

In that same paper of October 9 amongst the Auckland contingent of volunteers being farewelled before embarking for Wellington was Private Claude Jewell, 27, second class shot, of the Auckland Mounted Rifles. He was to make his name writing despatches from South Africa for the Auckland Star, thus continuing the tradition of soldier journalists. In a mirror of the Samoan conflict New Zealand had offered troops to support Britain in South Africa in September but this time the offer was accepted and troops left the country on October 21 (Crawford, 2000, pp. 59-63). This was the first time in the country’s history that New Zealand soldiers had left for service overseas. New Zealand contributed 10 separate contingents of around 6500 volunteers.14 The Observer noted in November 1899 that two Australian pressmen had been sent to South Africa to write up the war for the big dailies. One group consisting of the Melbourne Argus, Sydney Herald, Adelaide Register, Brisbane Courier and Perth West Australian combined to send Donald Macdonald, while an opposition group comprising the Melbourne Age, Sydney Telegraph, Adelaide

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14 One of these was the author’s great uncle Private David Bruce, 21, of the 7th contingent, who died with 23 others at one of the last major battles of the campaign at Langverwacht Hill, (Bohasberg) which ended on February 24 1902.
Advertiser and Perth Herald despatched W. J. Lambie to look after their interests. It was predictably scathing about what New Zealand dailies might do.

The cheapest thing in the "special war correspondent" line is alleged to have been accomplished by a big New Zealand daily. Directly it heard that the Government was despatching three tailors away in the SS Waiwera to complete the contingent's uniform on the trip to the Cape, it bespoke the literary services of one of the snips. Of course he will be paid according to measure and is expected to turn out slops of stuff. It may be shoddy but still it will sell the paper all right (Anonymous, 1899f).

Certainly the paper was not far off the mark as regards the newspapers feelings about the expense of sending correspondents overseas. The minutes of the board of the Otago Daily Times recorded the decisions made regarding New Zealand newspapers sending correspondents to South Africa (Anonymous, 1895-1901). In September the board discussed whether to send a correspondent and noted that it had had received an offer from Major Kennedy to do the job. However board members believed the cost of sending a special correspondent to the Transvaal would turn out to be too expensive. They decided to try and arrange with one of the Melbourne papers for the right to use their war correspondence. At the end of September, George Fenwick wrote to the editor of the Cape Times to arrange for correspondence to be sent to Dunedin in the event of war breaking out. This was felt by board members to be more satisfactory than using any of the Melbourne papers or than sending their own man. However by mid October and after war had broken out, the big three papers, the Otago Daily Times, The Press and the NZ Herald were again in talks about jointly sending correspondents to South Africa. The latter two papers pressed to send two people and picked J. Elder Moultray, a well known painter from Dunedin, as war artist, and a Colonel Morris. Neither Kennedy nor Morris actually went to South Africa but provided expert military commentary for opposing papers as the war progressed (Anonymous, 1901a). Strangely no mention was made in the Otago Daily

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15 Other journalists to cover the war for Australia were bush poet and journalist A. B. “Banjo” Paterson and A.A.G. “Smiler” Hales.

16 The Stones directory notes the Moultray family of artists living in Heriot Row, Dunedin in 1887 (Anonymous, 1887b).

17 Possibly Colonel C. C. Morris of Regent Rd, Dunedin, a veteran of the Indian Mutiny.
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Times board minutes of James Shand, who accompanied Moultray with the 1st contingent. The Evening Post did, however.

We have despatched two special correspondents (Mr Moultray, of Dunedin, and Mr Shand, of Auckland) to the scene of operations, with instructions to keep us especially well posted up in the doings of the New Zealand Contingent, and we have no doubt their letters will be looked for with the keenest interest. One of these correspondents is on the troopship Waiwera and the other is travelling in a merchant steamer by way of Australia. We have made other arrangements for securing promptly general news relating to the war, and the Press Association has also engaged a correspondent\(^1\), so that as far as human foresight can judge the readers of the Evening Post ought to be well served with news (Anonymous, 1899b).

James Shand had been a court reporter for the Dunedin Evening Star (Thomas, 1960), and was later to be the chief sub editor of the New Zealand Times (Miller, 1967) and editor of the Thames Star (Scholefield, 1958).

The cost of sending correspondents was now expected to be around £500-£600 for all the papers. The Otago Daily Times board agreed to this suggestion. However, all did not go smoothly for the war correspondents.\(^2\)

We were somewhat unfortunate in having Mr Moultray as well as our representative with the second contingent being struck down with enteric fever; but Mr J.A. Shand, our second representative with the first contingent, has admittedly done good work although he too was laid aside for a few weeks from the effects of the dreaded enteric (Anonymous, 1900d).

By March 1900 Moultray had been invalided back to New Zealand. He had been attached to Lieutenant-General French’s cavalry division in the six months he was in South Africa but after becoming prostrated with fever was warned that a second bout

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\(^{1}\) This correspondent is unknown.

\(^{2}\) The NZ Herald reported on September 29, 1899 that Thomas Putnam of Waipawa had been arrested in the Transvaal on a charge of sending “maliciously wrong information”. Putnam, who had spent two years in the Press Gallery in Wellington, had been acting as a Reuters agent in Bloemfontein and had apparently made a statement that “rubbed the Boers the wrong way” (Anonymous, 1899e).
could be fatal (Anonymous, 1900b; Shand, 1900). Some of his sketches of the war were published in the *Otago Witness* (Moultray, 1900a, 1900b).

According to the *Free Lance*, W. D. Campbell, of the *Lyttelton Times*, also went to report the South African War but had returned to New Zealand by September 1900 (Anonymous, 1900a). In February of that year the *Lyttelton Times* and the *Otago Daily Times* had decided to send a photographer out to the Transvaal and a Mr Hughes\(^\text{20}\) was picked for the job, but his work was considered unsatisfactory by Fenwick. In fact Fenwick was generally unhappy with the expenses his paper was incurring over war correspondence by the end of 1900. Not only had the paper expended about £600 for war correspondence from South Africa not including £242 for the cost of the telegraph services (nearly all despatches were telegraphed) the paper was also paying Major Kennedy for his expert commentary back home and its share of Arthur Adams’ despatches from China about the Boxer Rebellion. And the end of the war was still not in sight – so much for a short campaign. By the middle of 1900 Fenwick had had enough and demanded that Hughes, Shand and Adams be recalled from their various theatres of war (Fenwick, 1900-1901). Hughes had been a “severe disappointment, involving a big expenditure for practically nothing”, and while he thought Shand’s letters were “full of interest” he suggested in August to W. H. Triggs of *The Press* that Shand should be recalled as well. “An occasional letter from one of the other correspondents would probably suffice,” he told Triggs. Shand eventually returned in late December 1900 and Hughes in late January 1901.\(^\text{21}\)

Shand’s work was well received in New Zealand and he was often awarded a byline for his despatches, a rare honour. He showed considerable enterprise right from the start if this anecdote is to be believed. He told of receiving instructions to proceed to the Transvaal with the contingent as war correspondent. He purchased his gear - tent, folding bed, mess utensils etc and went to Wellington on October 21, 1899. The SS *Waiwera* was to sail at 4pm but Shand was informed at 10am that no correspondents could travel in her. At 2pm he appeared as a spectator on the troopship's deck.

\(^{20}\) No more is known of this man. Further research is needed, perhaps in *Press* archives.

\(^{21}\) Fenwick, writing to W. H. Triggs of the *Press*, on January 30, 1901, noted that Gresley Lukin of the *Evening Post* had appointed a Dr Purdie as correspondent with the sixth contingent (Fenwick, 1900-1901).
Once behind a deckhouse, I opened a bag and hastily threw off my coat, replaced it with a kharkee (sic) tunic that resembled that worn by the troopers in the general aspect and then I shoved by baggage into a cabin belonging to some of the officers of the ship and retired discreetly behind some horse boxes in the bows (Shand, 1899).

He was on his way along with the first contingent, comprising 214 officers and men and 251 horses. The *Free Lance* spoke highly of Shand.

Mr Shand of the *Thames Star*, who has been awarded the African war medal, was an energetic war correspondent who supplied many New Zealand newspapers with “copy” during the opening stages of the war. Oftentimes, when there was no help for it, Mr Shand was very near the firing line, and whatever happened he was ever most energetic in getting the true points of an engagement from men who were in it (Anonymous, 1901a).

Shand had several things in common with Malcolm Ross. He was a Dunedin journalist, he was involved in a failed attempt to write a history of New Zealand’s involvement in the South African War (McGibbon, 2003, p. 401) and he had two sons who enlisted in World War I. When they were wounded and invalided to England Shand enlisted and reached the rank of Captain (Anonymous, 1915). Ross’s son Noel enlisted in 1915 and was wounded and invalided to England. Ross was made an honorary Captain and was involved in the failed attempt at an official history of New Zealand’s involvement in the war. A possible reason why Shand was not considered for the position of official war correspondent in 1914 was that he had apparently promised his two sons to stay at home for this war. When they were injured he promptly handed over management of the *Thames Star* to his daughter Bessie, and enlisted (Anonymous, 1915). By that time Malcolm Ross had been selected.

One sentence in *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history* outlined the New Zealand press’s contribution to war correspondence in the South African War. It only mentioned James Shand and J. Elder Moultray and failed to mention Claude Jewell. Jewell had “laid up a good deal of experience of the strenuous work of colonisation in Australia before coming to New Zealand” (Anonymous, 1910). As Trooper No 149 with the first contingent he wrote numerous reports for the *Auckland*
Star. “His ‘copy’ was written in a bright and breezy style and attracted considerable popular attention and commendation,” said The Observer. They were also remembered for their “pith and humour” (Anonymous, 1907d). On his return from the war he went to the literary staff of The Observer, serving at one stage as editor, then transferred to Wellington and became a sub editor on the Free Lance, on the New Zealand Times and thence to Taranaki “to manufacture inky thunderbolts” for the Taranaki Daily News (Anonymous, 1911). He returned to Auckland and wrote for the Auckland Star until his death in 1936 (Stowers, 1992). Newspapers also ran letters from soldiers on their war pages, and one such trooper was Malcolm Ross’s younger brother, John, who enlisted with the Rough Riders of the fourth contingent. He wrote letters home to Malcolm who passed them on to the Evening Post for publication (J. Ross, 1900a, 1900b).

The “Boxer” rebellion 1900

At the same time as New Zealand soldiers were fighting in South Africa, nations were attempting to quell a rebellion that had broken out in China against foreign influence in that country. Russian troops flooded into China and Manchuria, crushing the rebels, the so-called Boxers. The unrest was at its most intense in 1900 from about early May to the middle of September. In June George Fenwick received a letter from the editor of The Press wondering whether their papers, along with the Evening Post and the NZ Herald, should send a special correspondent to China. If the costs were shared it was thought this might be £100 each. The Otago Daily Times board agreed (Anonymous, 1895-1901). As mentioned previously Arthur Adams, the son of a Dunedin surveyor and nephew of E. T. Gillon, previously of Wellington’s Evening Post, was chosen in July as correspondent in China. The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history does not mention Adams or this Chinese conflict. In October, three months after Adams had left for China, Fenwick was writing to Triggs suggesting that Adams should be recalled “within reasonable time” (Fenwick, 1900-1901). He obviously felt the £69.15.0 which had already been spent on Adams was sufficient. But Adams was still in China in January 1901 laid up with enteric fever and malaria (Fenwick, 1900-1901). While in China Adams reached Peking and met up with Dr George Morrison, the correspondent of the London Times. He also joined the Victorian contingent on a
130 mile march into the interior. By the time he returned to Tientsin he had fallen ill and spent two months in bed (Anonymous, 1901b). He returned to New Zealand on the Mokoia on March 21, 1901. Malcolm Ross interviewed Adams, an old Dunedin friend, as he passed through Wellington on his way south (M. Ross, 1901).

**War correspondence and the Russo-Japanese War 1904**

The next war to be given maximum exposure in daily newspapers round the world but to which no New Zealand journalists appeared to have been sent was the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. However, it has been included because of its implications for the future of war correspondents. In January of 1904, with war looking likely between Japan and Russia, the *Otago Daily Times* was contemplating whether it should send a correspondent and photographer to cover the conflict. Fenwick was willing to spend £250. As always, he discussed this with his fellow editors on *The Press*, *NZ Herald* and *Evening Post* – now called the New Zealand Associated Press. By mid February for some reason the arrangement fell through (Anonymous, 1901-08). Nevertheless, watching events from southern latitudes, the *Otago Daily Times* saw ominous signs for war correspondents in that conflict. In a leading article titled *Are war correspondents doomed?* the paper mourned what it saw as the demise of this type of journalist. After a brief existence of 50 years, and a string of notable war correspondents ranging from Russell, through Forbes and George Steevens to Bennett Burleigh, the day of the war correspondent was over, the paper feared.

...brilliant as has been the record of the past, and however undoubted the many services rendered to the public, there are ominous signs that the day of the war correspondent is done, and that his place will be filled by agencies leaving little loophole for the exercise of the individuality which makes for fame. The influences at work in this direction do not signify any abatement in journalistic enterprise, but are traceable first and foremost to the development of increasing facilities for telegraphic communication, and secondly to the growing secretiveness of governments leading to the imposition of such restrictions as render the best efforts of war correspondents practically futile (Anonymous, 1904).

The paper was referring in particular to the Russian and Japanese combatants’ refusal to allow journalists to accompany their armies. According to Knightley, the Japanese
“imposed a stifling censorship and kept the band of international correspondents cooling their heels in Tokyo’s best hotels” (Knightley, 2000, p. 64). The Otago Daily Times leader continued.

… only the veriest outline of the operations has been allowed to trickle through, and this for the most part obtained from official sources, supplemented occasionally by hearsay descriptions of some of the more important encounters. In no case has there been any opportunity for brilliant accounts of the battles from the pen of eye witnesses.

The paper continued that of later years, and especially during the South African War, there had been a growing feeling that the great daily newspapers were not receiving adequate return for the large sums of money spent by them on special war correspondents.

The restrictions imposed by the war office authorities were doubtless due to the large number of correspondents sent out and the increasing competition for news and the Censor naturally favoured the press agencies which supplied a number of journals rather than isolated effort on behalf of a single paper. The result was to discount largely the value of a special war correspondent.

Another factor, said the paper, unknown in the days of Russell and Forbes, was that a despatch, arriving weeks after the telegraphic account of any event, to some extent lost its interest.

Nowadays the reading public has been educated into having its news red hot: what they want is the facts, and they are not so very particular at to how those facts are served up. Plus the brief telegraphic summary robs of half its interest the war correspondent's most vividly written account, and only an exceptionally gifted men, such, for instance, as Steevens, of the Daily Mail, can depend upon interesting the public.

The paper said it was too early to correctly weigh up the arguments for and against such strict secrecy regarding the operations of the rival armies of Japan and Russia as to justify the rigid exclusion of all war correspondents from the field of battle. While the success of an important campaign might be endangered by the premature disclosure of plans, and a general may be occasionally embarrassed by the adverse
criticism of a newspaper man, “yet posterity has proved the value of independent testimony when the methods of belligerents are called into question”. The writer of this leader was remarkably prescient and astute in his observations. He was foreshadowing many of the problems the official war correspondent was to face in World War I. One feels he was also wistfully farewelling the romantic notions of the war correspondent as hero. Any research on early war correspondence would need to examine these reflections in more depth to see if there was any relevance in the context of New Zealand.

The period between the South African War and the outbreak of World War I was a mirror of what happened between the end of the New Zealand Wars and prior to the troops being sent to the Transvaal. War correspondents came on speaking tours round the country. This time the journalists tended to be Australian rather than British. Among those visiting were Banjo Paterson and Donald Macdonald who managed to have their lectures double billed in Dunedin. They got over this difficulty by joining forces and sharing the time (Anonymous, 1900c). Macdonald was said to have made more than £6000 on his New Zealand lecture tour and his manager made £2000(Anonymous, 1901c). Another visiting war correspondent was Charles Harrison Gibbons, a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War and the Sino-Japanese War (Anonymous, 1907a). There did not seem to be so much published about war correspondents in the years between the South African War and 1914 except for extensive coverage of the deaths of William Russell in 1907 (Anonymous, 1907b, 1907c) and Bennett Burleigh in 1914 (Anonymous, 1914c), correspondents who had been lionised in the 19th century.

**Last foray of an independent war correspondent**

New Zealand became involved in World War I after Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. As evidenced in previous conflicts which concerned the Mother Country, New Zealand was quick to offer her military services. In fact, was the first of the ex-colonies to do so, if a story in the *NZ Herald* is to be believed (Scholefield, 1914). Britain was as equally quick to accept and secretly charged New Zealand forces with capturing German Samoa (Crawford, 2000) p. 174. When the
two troopships set forth on August 15, on board one of them, Troopship No 1, the Monowai, was Malcolm Ross. The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history does mention Ross’s role in this campaign, albeit briefly. German Samoa was successfully taken on August 29. The press obviously chafed under the censorship restrictions which forbade them even speculating where the troops may have been sent. A NZ Herald leader bemoaned the "dense fog which enshrouds every area under the control of the military and naval authorities"(Anonymous, 1914e). The Governor even had to appeal to the nation to understand the need for secrecy and not spread rumours about the destination of the NZEF (Anonymous, 1914b) Official acknowledgment of the action was finally received by the New Zealand public via London on Monday afternoon August 31 in the Evening Post and by the NZ Herald and Otago Daily Times the next morning (Anonymous, 1914d, 1914f).

The NZ Herald correspondent in Noumea then stole a march on Ross and sent off a report, published in the paper on September 3, describing the troops’ rendezvous at New Caledonia (Anonymous, 1914a). Why didn’t Ross do the same? In his first report he commented on calling in at Noumea:

One might have posted news of our expedition here, but so far as I was concerned, I decided to play the game and say nothing. Letters sent from here might fall into the hands of the enemy, and, so as far as our expedition was concerned, might give away the whole show.

Michael Field, in his two books, Mau and Black Sunday pilloried Ross for his “patriotic self-censorship” and classed him as a “fairly poor journalist” for not sending off a story, saying that at that stage there was no censorship (Field, 1984, pp. 6-7, 2006, p. 31). However Field was wrong, there was censorship and it had been imposed very soon after war had been declared (Hansard, 1914b, p. 380). Readers had to wait a day after Ross’s return on September 7 to read the first of his despatches (M. Ross, 1914c). He also submitted an official report to the Government on the taking of Samoa and this was forwarded to the Press Association (M. Ross, 1914b). Both aroused a political hornets’ nest on publication. The rivalry between political parties and their respective

22 He also found time to write a one and a half column article for The New York Times which was sent from Wellington on September 19 and bylined “by Malcolm Ross FRGS, special correspondent of The New York Times” (M. Ross, 1914f).
newspapers erupted in Parliament when it was learned that Ross had stolen his journalistic confreres’ thunder by accompanying the NZEF to Samoa. At the last minute, he had made arrangements to go with the troops with the commandant of the New Zealand forces, General Alexander Godley. In his dispatch Ross indicated how hurried the arrangements were.

There was little time left for packing, all one could do was to hurriedly throw a few garments and odds and ends into a suitcase and make a dash for the wharf in a taxi, but the troopships had already gone into the harbour, after the hurried farewell to the force at the Basin Reserve, and we had to skirmish round the waterfront in the dark until we located the launch that was taking General Godley back from the troopers. The ships were invisible in a grey mist that had settled down upon the harbour. The launch nosed her way through this, and soon I found myself at Troopship No 1 (M. Ross, 1914c).

Ross had obviously informed either Fenwick or Triggs of what was happening before he left, because the minutes of the Otago Daily Times board on August 21, while Ross was sailing to Samoa, said that arrangements had been made with him to leave New Zealand with the 1st NZEF as special correspondent for the Otago Daily Times, The Press, The Dominion and NZ Herald with the salary to be £8 per week plus expenses of £10 towards photographic equipment. Ross was expected to be absent about two months (Anonymous, 1908-1917). He was only away for three weeks, which must have gladdened the hearts of the accountants. He wrote four very long narrative pieces for the Otago Daily Times (M. Ross, 1914a, 1914c, 1914d, 1914e), parts of which were also published in The Press and NZ Herald and other papers.

While Ross’s masters may have been happy, the opposition politicians and the opposition papers were not. Opposition leader Joseph Ward accused Prime Minister William Massey in Parliament on the day that Ross’s reports were published of discrimination in favour of Reformist newspapers and of favouritism towards Ross. If journalists were to go with the Expeditionary Force, they should be representative of all sections of the press in the Dominion, said Ward. “…there was a feeling at the moment that there was a one-sided arrangement being made in the special interests of

23 The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history said Ross was “recalled”, but does not say by whom or why.
the Reform Party as far as the Press was concerned.” Ward wanted to know how Ross was selected to go to Samoa (Hansard, 1914a). Massey replied that after the troops had been farewelled he returned to the House in the evening to find Ross on the bureau telephone trying to arrange for a launch to take him out to one of the transports lying in the stream. Ross told Massey he had arranged with General Godley to go with the 1st NZEF, apparently on his own initiative – something which was Ross’s trademark. When Ross returned he called to see the Prime Minister and agreed to supply a report of the action in Samoa to the Government. This was written up and sent to Massey that day. Ward was still not convinced and claimed that if a journalist was to accompany New Zealand forces then his reports should be made available to all the country’s newspapers. Massey was satisfied that this had been done because he had sent the report to the Press Association which then distributed it. It was pointed out that at least two other journalists had applied to go to Samoa, although the Government denied any knowledge of these applications. One was said to be H.T.B Drew, one time owner of the Manawatu Times, and an Ashburton journalist, Mr Choate. Drew figures in later accounts as a possible official war correspondent and then later as a writer of one of the popular histories of New Zealand’s involvement in World War I (Drew, 1923).

At the same time as the NZEF was preparing to set out for Samoa, the New Zealand Government was being informed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies dated August 12 that if it so desired one war correspondent, representing the whole press of the country, could accompany the British Forces in the field, such correspondent being subject to military regulations (Hansard, 1914a). The focus now turned to which New Zealand journalist was going to get the job, how he was going to get it, who would pay him and for whom he would be writing. Whereas before it had been a decision made by individual newspapers whether to send journalists to cover conflicts, this time it was to be a different story. One journalist alone was to go and whoever it was, he was going to be a servant of the Government, and by association, of the military authorities, and not any individual newspaper. A new tradition of war correspondence was about to commence.
Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate that New Zealand newspapers up to 1915 had seen the importance of first hand accounts of conflicts that had relevance to the country and so had sent journalists to deliver those reports. This was in refutation of the claim made in *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history* that New Zealand had not established any strong tradition of war correspondence. Before World War I reporting of war had not been sponsored by the state, as claimed in the book. Many newspapers assigned war correspondents to cover the New Zealand Wars, the Samoan “troubles”, the South African War and the Boxer rebellion. The tradition is much richer than that suggested and several more war correspondents have been discovered who were not mentioned in *The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history*. However, this paper is an introduction to the topic only and much more research is needed to flesh out this information.

If newspapers had no wars to which they sent correspondents they certainly kept abreast of what other war correspondents were doing abroad. Up to and including the South African War it seems clear that war correspondents were as much news as the events they covered. British journalists such as Russell, Forbes, Burleigh, and Steevens were household names in New Zealand and their “adventures” were covered regularly and in detail and their deaths recorded in the same way. After the South African War the interest seems to have waned, and it would be interesting to consider why this might have been so. Perhaps the age of the individual, brilliant war correspondent was over, as suggested by the *Otago Daily Times*’ editorial, killed off by the telegraph, news agencies and increasing military restrictions.

Other tentative conclusions can be drawn based on information available to date. Those men who reported wars usually did so as an adjunct to their normal work, not as professional war correspondents. Quite often they were soldier journalists, such as Woon, Montrose and Jewell. Because of the cost, many New Zealand newspapers joined forces to send journalists overseas. The most significant syndicate included four of the most powerful papers in the country – the *NZ Herald*, *The Press*, the *Otago Daily Times* and *The Evening Post* collectively called the New Zealand
Associated Press. For the overseas wars, papers did not expect to have their journalists away for any length of time and usually withdrew them early because of the expense of maintaining them abroad. They then had to arrange other means of informing their readers of the war. During their assignments the correspondents seemed relatively free to get near the front and report the action and with little censorship. More research needs to be conducted to determine whether The Oxford companion to New Zealand military history’s claim that some of the journalists were competent but not particularly good writers was true. Ross was not an especially riveting writer but in 1914 it was not his writing style that got him into hot water on his return from Samoa; it was his too close association with the ruling party of William Massey. This assignment smacked of conspiracy and favouritism to the Opposition politicians, as Ross also worked for avowedly Reformist newspapers. He was not seen as a neutral journalist. Godley, who had helped to arrange the assignment for Ross, was probably naïve to think Ross would be acceptable but one doubts he would have even considered the political repercussions of choosing him. In fact a military man suggesting a war correspondent accompany the troops would have been a rarity and indicates just how sure Godley must have been of Ross that he would not rock the boat, figuratively speaking, with his despatches. Before 1914 any newspaper could, if it wished and if it could support the expense, appoint a journalist to cover a conflict. Many did, and the military appeared able to accommodate them. This state of affairs did not survive the outbreak of war in 1914.

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