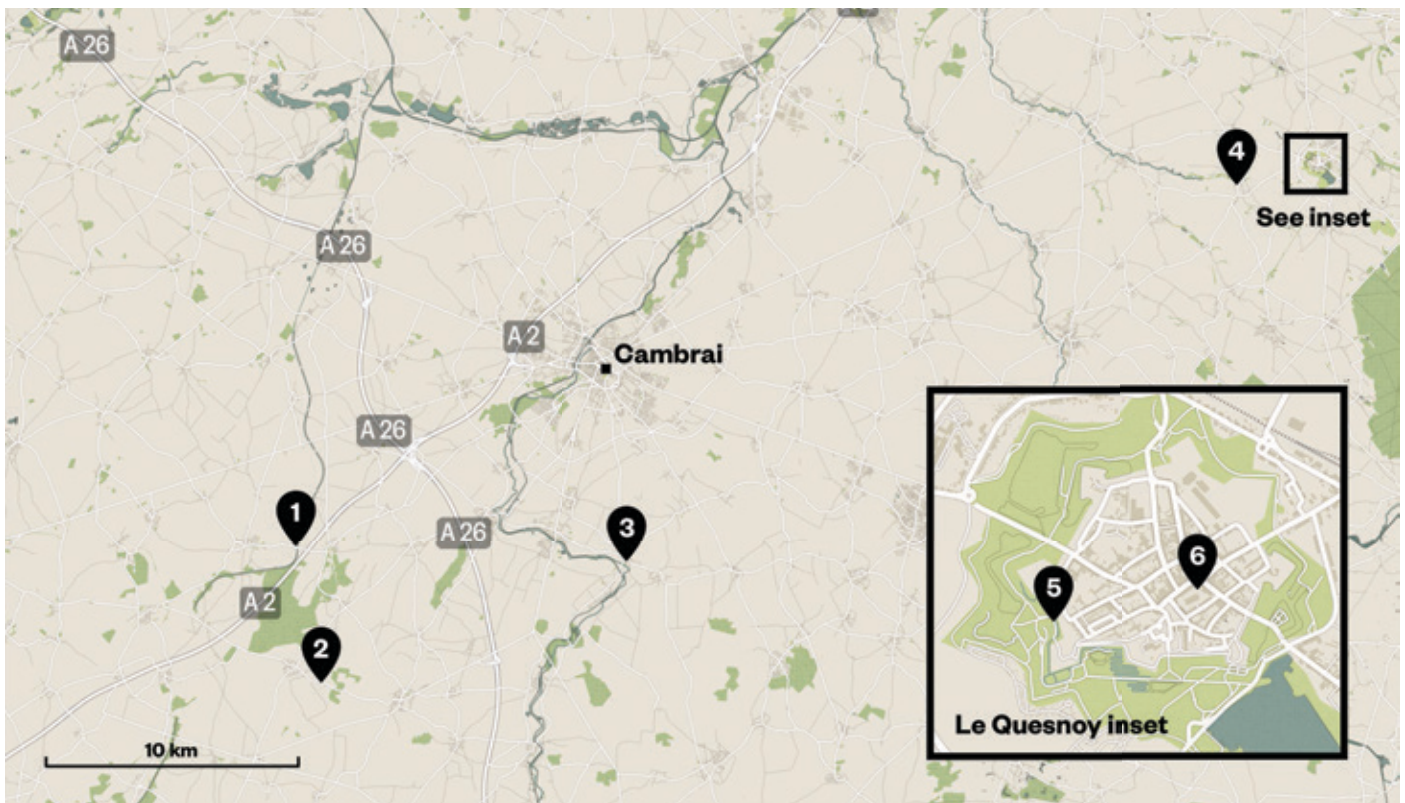




Trail 9

Road to Le Quesnoy

The New Zealanders surrounded Le Quesnoy but the Germans refused to surrender.



Taking the trail

From the Gare d'Arras take Boulevard Carnot and turn first left on to the D917 following the sign towards Beaurains. Continue on the D917 for approximately 20 km. At the roundabout take the third exit continuing on the D917. At the second roundabout take the second exit to stay on the D917 towards Lille/Autres Directions. At the third roundabout take the third exit onto the D930 signposted to Cambrai.

Continue on the D930 for about 10 km. Turn right at the signpost to Hermies/Doignies onto the D34. Continue on the D34 through Doignies. Continue through Hermies as the road changes to the D5. Continue through Hermies

following the D5, which turns left at the T-junction. After about 1.5 km you will come to Havrincourt Bridge.

Find a park before you cross the bridge and walk back towards the bridge you have just crossed. Stand facing where the bridge begins.

GPS 50.110010, 3.067800

Plan your time

Allow 2 to 4 hours to explore the trail. If you're short of time, simply visit stop 5: NZ Memorial for an overview of the entire trail.

The Road to Le Quesnoy trail

1. Havrincourt Bridge
2. Metz-en-Couture Cemetery
3. Crèvecœur
4. Beaudignies
5. **New Zealand Memorial**
– *Trail overview*
6. Town Square

Visit ngatapuwaee.nz/westernfront for more information on the trails.

Map based on OpenStreetMap data (licensed under ODbL) which is © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Stop 1

Havrincourt Bridge

Advancing through here, New Zealanders erected the largest temporary bridge ever constructed on the Western Front.



Officers of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company stand on the Canal du Nord bridge near Bapaume, France, October 1918. Archives New Zealand, WA10/3 ZMR 6/7/4 <https://flickr.com/photos/archivesnz/14586452390/>

GPS 50.110010, 3.067800

Getting there from Arras

See directions on page 1.

Your stop

Find a park after you cross the bridge and walk back towards the bridge you have just crossed. Stand facing where the bridge and the canal below.

Story

You're standing on the bank of the Canal du Nord. In front of you are the two bridges over the canal at Havrincourt and the village of Havrincourt itself is further beyond the tree line.

The Canal du Nord in September 1918 was dry, and the canal hadn't yet been completed, but the walls and what was then, an enormous dry moat, was the real obstacle. The New Zealanders were fighting in this area, and as the Germans evacuated Bapaume, the New Zealanders took Bancourt and Fremicourt.

The Canadians were breaking through at Drocourt-Quéant to the north and the Australians were taking Saint Quentin to the South. It's here that the New Zealanders advance across the canal into the forest of Bois du Havrincourt, that you see on the skyline to your left, and these enormous woods were the next obstacle.

From 2 to 9 September, the New Zealanders gradually fought their way around the edges of that wood, pushing the Germans back. To delay the Allied advance, the Germans destroyed the bridge here. It was then the task of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company, working with engineers, to erect the largest temporary bridge ever constructed by the British Army on the Western Front.

It is a credit to the Tunnellers' ingenuity that they were selected to carry out what was the most difficult bridging task of the whole war. Its length of 55 metres was regarded as the longest single-span bridge in the history of warfare at that time.

This was completed in an amazingly short time frame -- eight days. There was no opportunity for site preparation as it was on the British front line and could not be started before the attack on 27 September. Many of the men that worked on this bridge had worked on the main trunk line in New Zealand - so this was meat and drink to them. It was not until 1926 that this bridge was replaced with a permanent structure.

The New Zealand Tunnellers' bridge at Havrincourt was a tribute to the work of that Tunnelling Company, but also it reminds us that an army marches on its stomach. As Haig's armies advanced, following up the German retreat - thousands of tonnes of ammunition, fodder, petrol, supplies and so forth, had to follow them up too.

Had the bridge not been built so quickly, then the 3rd Army advance would have ground to a halt, and the Germans would have had plenty of time to consolidate their positions, and fight a more organised, and effective withdrawal.

Russell had trained his division for mobile warfare, and he used his three infantry brigades with artillery, cavalry, and tanks moving up behind his Mounted Rifles who looked for the weak spots in the German line.

The key was to keep the ball rolling. Around the edges of Havrincourt Wood, the New Zealanders kept mounting attacks, pushing the Germans back over 13 kilometers, and this pressure, stopped them from mounting a better defence.

Let's move on to Metz-en-Couture Cemetery.



A bridge over the Nord Canal between Hermies and Havrincourt - built by New Zealand Engineers. September 1918. © Imperial War Museums (Q 47541)

Stop 2

Metz-en-Couture Cemetery

The New Zealanders battled the Germans back and forth over this ground, with intense fighting.



German prisoners, escorted by New Zealanders, walk past Havrincourt Wood. 16 September 1918.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-013603-G. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23130859>

GPS 50.061971, 3.076144

Getting there from Havrincourt Bridge

Continue along the D5 towards Havrincourt. You will come to a T-junction, turn right towards Trescault onto the D15. At Trescault you'll come to an intersection, turn right onto the D17 towards Metz-en-Couture. When you arrive at the crossroads at Metz-en-Couture you will see a signpost to Metz-en-Couture Cemetery. Turn left onto the D7 towards Gouzeaucourt, you will come to the cemetery on your right.

Your stop

Enter up the steps into the military cemetery, walk up to the memorial cross and turn left walking towards the cemetery wall. Face towards the wall, away from the headstones looking at the wooded area on the skyline.

Story

You're standing in Metz-en-Couture Cemetery, and this section is the Commonwealth War Graves Extension to the communal cemetery that's behind you.

The road running past the cemetery runs from Metz-en-Couture down into the dip in front of you and up on to the next ridge which is the Trescault Spur. Beyond that is the village of Gouzeaucourt, and on 9 September 1918, the New Zealand Division had worked its way through Havrincourt Wood - behind you, and faced this ridge line which was held in strength by the Germans.

Over the next three days in September, there was intense fighting all along this ridge. Just beyond Gouzeaucourt Wood was the old British frontline and the New Zealanders had now worked their way back to those trenches again. This time, they're manned by Germans who are determined to hold them while they repair and occupy the Hindenberg line.

The New Zealand Rifle Brigade attacked the ridge in front of you to take the trenches beyond the woods. They grabbed them, but were counterattacked by the remaining German forces.

The Germans used everything they had, attacking with flame-throwers, grenades and giving it all they've got. Fighting was intense all along this spurline. The New

Zealanders lost, then took the ground gain, finally holding it on 12 September.

It's here that Sergeant Harry Laurent went forward with a party of 12 men to take the African trench, which was the strongest trench on the crest. By this stage the artillery bombardment had reduced the trench to a cratered maze, and Laurent and his men went right through it, almost reaching the village of Gouzeaucourt itself.

Just before the village he came across a defended trench. He realised that he'd gone too far - but he decided to have a go anyway. He and his 12 men attacked and quickly found that it was occupied by a company of Germans - around 120-strong, but he took them on anyway. What followed next was absolute madness.

After a brief fire-fight, followed by hand-to-hand fighting, Laurent and his squad killed 30 of the enemy, captured an officer and took over 100 prisoners. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for this remarkable achievement.

The cost of this fighting can be seen all around you in this cemetery. There are 40 New Zealand graves in total, and almost all of them are from the Rifle Brigade. If you look at their ages, you will see soldiers ranging from 22 to 40.

Look at the graves of the NCO and the

officer. They are both originals who, came across with the Rifle Brigade in 1915, first to Egypt, and who now finally, died leading their men in this advance on the Hindenburg line.



A painting by George Edmund Butler. 'A silhouette of Gouzeacourt' 1918.

Archives New Zealand, Ref: AAAC 898 NCWA Q454, <http://warart.archives.govt.nz/node/553>

Stop 3

Crèvecœur

Attempting to cross the river here, the New Zealanders ran into major problems.



A painting by Nugent Welch, 'Bridge, Canal de l'Escaut, Crèvecœur'. 1918.

Archives New Zealand, Ref: AAAC 898 NCWA 403, <http://warart.archives.govt.nz/node/450>

GPS 50.104473, 3.247571

Getting there from Metz-en-Couture Cemetery

Continue down the road towards Gouzeaucourt. Following the signs to the Centre-Ville you will come to an intersection, turn left on the D917 towards Cambrai. Continue on this road for about 6 kilometres. The D917 will pass over the A26. As you approach the intersection, get into the left-hand lane to turn left onto the D644 towards Crèvecœur/Les Rue des Vignes, going straight through the roundabout, and make a sharp right onto the D96. At Vaucelles turn left following the signs to Crèvecœur/Les Rue des Vignes on the D103. Follow this road for about 3.5 kilometres and you will cross a bridge over the river L'Escaut. As you come into the town of Crèvecœur after about 350 metres you will see a small bridge.

Your stop

Stand on the small bridge and face towards the village.

Story

You're standing on the little bridge over the river Escaut at the edge of the village of Crèvecœur which is in front of you.

The New Zealand Division was withdrawn for a rest after taking Trescault spur. It was reinforced, reorganised and retrained. It was then sent back in to take part in the advance on Cambrai and the taking of the Hindenburg line. Russell's division advanced towards the Bonavis Ridge which is on the high ground in the distance in front of you. This was the formidable Hindenburg line.

This branch of the river Escaut, or Scheldt as the Germans called it, is not very wide, but in 1918, it was deeper and equally swift flowing. If you look down the road, back in the direction of La Rue des Vignes, there is the Canal you crossed which creates an island in this area between the canal and this stream.

The New Zealanders attempted to cross this stream before first light on 30 September, push through Crèvecœur and secure the far end of the village before taking the next section of the Hindenburg line.

This was the 2nd Auckland Battalion area, and everything went wrong. The 15th North Auckland Company, led by Captain Evans, was the only company to get here on time. All the other companies got lost, and the runners

couldn't find the commanding officer. Evans' company got here before first light, and crossed the river, over the Canal bridge on to this island, and he sent a platoon forward to where you're standing.

There were no houses here at the time, and this was open marshy ground. The Germans in the village waited until the leading section of this platoon approached the old stone bridge that stood here and then their machine guns opened up.

The leading section on the bridge were all killed, as well as the platoon commander and sergeant. The rest of the men took cover. The surviving NCO Corporal Stewart organised what was left of the platoon in a ditch nearby. He desperately needed to get word back to Evans, and so Private James Crichton volunteered.

Crichton had spent most of the war running the divisional bakery but wanted to see some action so he volunteered for the infantry and now got more than he had bargained for. Despite being wounded in the foot he swam the canal, ran the machine gun gauntlet across the open ground and reported to Captain Evans.

Crichton mentioned that he saw wires under the stone bridge and that it could be mined. Evans asked if it was

possible to clear the mines. Crichton again volunteered, ran through enemy fire, swam the canal and reported back to Stewart. He then crawled forward to this stone bridge, and found explosives with wires attached. He cut the wires and dropped the mines into the water.

He then reported back to Captain Evans. It was only later while helping to carry wounded back to the aid post, that a padre noticed Crichton's foot wound, and he finally got medical attention.

Crichton was later awarded the VC. Evans' party by the canal set up a strong a defensive position, but Stewart's group, crouching in the ditch by this bridge were overwhelmed that evening, and were taken prisoner.

The next day the New Zealand Division attacked and the 1st and 2nd Aucklands were badly mauled. The following day, 1 October, they attacked again and, despite serious casualties, finally took Crèvecœur and establish a bridge-head.

Ahead of the New Zealanders was the Hindenburg line, this was covered by barbed wire, that in some cases was 100 to 200 metres deep and defended by a determined and skillful enemy.

Stop 4

Beaudignies

The Germans were falling back, and the New Zealanders and British were in hot pursuit.

GPS 50.240172, 3.591846

Getting there from Crèvecœur

Continue down the road that brought you here and follow the signpost straight onto the D76 towards Cambrai. Go straight through the roundabout to stay on the D76. After approximately 6.5 kilometres you will reach Cambrai. At the mini-roundabout, take the second exit to remain on the D76. At the next large roundabout, take the first exit towards Valenciennes. At the second roundabout take the second exit onto the D2076 towards Valenciennes. Continue straight on at the traffic lights on D2076. Shortly after going over a railway track, you will come to a third roundabout - take the third exit onto the D2643 signposted 'Autres Directions'. After about 750 metres, take a right turn to Valenciennes onto the D630. At the roundabout take the second exit, following the D114. Continue on this road for approximately 20 kilometres - it will take you through the towns of Villers-en-Cauchies and Saulzoir towards Bermerain/Le Quesnoy. At Saulzoir you will come to a T-junction. Turn right onto the D955 and then third left will bring you back onto the D114 towards Le Quesnoy. After crossing a second stream (L'Écaillon) you will come to a T-junction. Take a right onto the D85 towards Bermerain. At Bermerain follow the signs to Ruesnes/Le Quesnoy this will take you back onto the D114. Drive through Ruesnes and you will come to a roundabout. Take the first exit onto the D100 signposted to Beaudignies.

Follow the main road as you come into the town and you will pass a small chapel on your right. About 50 metres down the road you will come to a carpark on your left. There is a small stream (L'Écaillon) and a bridge next to this carpark.

Your stop

Stand on the small bridge over the Écaillon stream and face the way you have come. You should be able to see the small chapel on the corner.



Cooks preparing a meal for New Zealand soldiers near the front. Beaudignies, 29 October 1918.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-013690-G. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22885561>

Story

You're standing on the edge of the small village of Beaudignies next to the tiny Écaillon stream. 23 October 1918 was a successful day for the New Zealand Division.

It had advanced from Solesmes, pushing the Germans back, and snuffing out any resistance as they came. The British armies in France were on a roll, and Haig was pushing his army commanders to keep going - and keep the Germans off-balance. The German withdrawal, now started to fall apart.

By October, the British, including the New Zealanders, had broken through the Hindenburg line - and were advancing towards the Belgian frontier. Germany was exhausted and the German Army was now reduced to old men and young boys. Companies were down to 30 or 40 men, and there was now only one team of horses for every three guns in their artillery.

Supplies were severely stretched, and morale was low, with desertions more and more common - it was increasingly obvious that they could not win this war. The Germans, facing the New Zealanders, fell back on the old fortress town of Le Quesnoy.

Here, late in the afternoon, on 23 October the 2nd Canterbury reached this bridge. The leading infantry ran into a German patrol at the corner ahead of you - there was a burst of fire and the New Zealand sergeant leading the patrol was killed.

The dead man was Sergeant Henry James Nicholas, Victoria Cross and Military Medal winner. Again, it was these experienced NCOs who took the lead and in this case paid the price.

The New Zealand Division pushed on towards the next obstacle which was the German-held town of Le Quesnoy.

Stop 5

New Zealand Memorial

The Germans were almost surrounded and it became a race to see who could take the town.

Must-do stop

This stop introduces the Road to Le Quesnoy trail. If you're unable to do the whole trail, this stop gives you the big-picture story in one go.

GPS 50.246191, 3.631948

Getting there from Beaudignies

Continue down the road and you will come to a roundabout. At the roundabout take the D942 towards Le Quesnoy (2nd exit). After about 3 kilometres you will come to a roundabout, take the second exit towards the Centre Ville/Porte St Martin to stay on the D942. At the second roundabout take the first exit onto the D114 towards Centre Ville/Porte St Martin. As you go through the ramparts, take a right signposted to Monument des Néo-Zélandais. Find a park and follow the signposted walk to the New Zealand Monument in the Jardin des Souvenirs.

Your stop

Stand and face the New Zealand Memorial.



A New Zealand soldier stands atop the walls of the town of Le Quesnoy after the town's capture. November 1918. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-013791-G. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22855444>

Story

You're standing next to the inner ramparts of the fortress of Le Quesnoy - a brilliant Vauban fortification of the 17th century.

1918 was a year of outstanding success for the New Zealand Division - it started with them successfully holding the line against the German advance on Amiens at Mailly-Maillet. They then took Rossignol Wood and then kept advancing forward - to where you are now. As 2nd Lieutenant Richards described it, it was like a series of waves lapping forward, being momentarily held by the Germans, and then lapping forward again, with the New Zealand Division spearheading the advance.

By this stage, Russell was confident that his three infantry brigades with their artillery, tanks and support from cavalry including the Otago Mounted Rifles, could deal with anything that they faced.

The attack on Bapaume was followed by the taking of the Trescault spur, the advance to Crèvecœur, and then Solesmes. Now the object was to bypass Le Quesnoy and advance to the next river line and seize a crossing. Russell's intention was to use his weakest brigade, the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, to surround Le Quesnoy. He was conscious of the civilian population. And he didn't want to bombard the town itself, but he fired mortars and machine guns on top of the ramparts to mask his advance.

A special British mortar-detachment fired drums of oil that exploded in fire and smoke shielding New Zealand movement from the German defenders.

"Immediately after the commencement of the artillery fire a sheet of flame rushed skywards from behind the waiting troops, and following a pause during which a mighty rushing noise seemed to drown all other sounds, huge flames burst from hundreds of points beyond the railway and about the outworks of the town. This was the special burning-oil bombardment which, though it resulted in little material damage to the enemy's position or to his men, had, nevertheless, a most important moral effect on both attackers and defenders."

– **Lieutenant-Colonel William Austin**

Russell's plan bypassed the German infantry who fell back into the town. The New Zealanders also captured all of the German artillery, which being short of horses, were grouped together, and some 57 guns were taken.

The New Zealanders now pushed past the town heading towards the next river line. Meanwhile the 4th Rifle Battalion led by Lieutenant-Colonel Barrowclough, pushed through the outer defences up to this city wall. All around the town, the other battalions of the Rifle Brigade were doing the same. It became a race.

They were not supposed to attack the town, but everyone wanted to be the first in. Barrowclough's soldiers worked their way forward, with them were New Zealand Engineers, and as Le Quesnoy was an apple growing area, the Engineers had collected ladders from surrounding orchards - because they knew the walls were going to be a problem.

"The 30-foot ladder was too short to reach from the bottom of the moat to the top of the final wall but there was one place where the ladder could be placed to reach the top. This was on a narrow stone bridge, about a foot wide, which spanned the moat and was connected with a sluice-gate ... After crossing this bridge and sluice-gate a narrow ledge ran for some 10 yards beside the wall to an arched opening, giving entrance to the town, but which - needless to say - had been completely blocked by the enemy to deny us access through the wall."

- 2nd-Lieutenant Leslie Averill

This water gate was the only point where the single remaining ladder would reach the top. Unlike the monument that you see in front of you which has about 15 or so guys clinging to the one ladder, the reality was that only one fully equipped soldier could go up at a time - any more men on the ladder, and it would break, with them all tumbling down.

They set the ladder up on the dam leading to the watergate and 2nd Lieutenant Averill, pistol in hand, went up first.

A few more men followed him up and when they were at the top, Averill looked down, saw a couple of Germans, and fired at them - and they vanished into the town. Averill led a half dozen New Zealanders forward, and if you read the New York Times and the world press in 1918, you would hear all about the New Zealanders fighting their way over the walls of Le Quesnoy - but nothing like that happened.

The battle was getting to the wall, and once Averill got to the top - word spread like wildfire.

"...as we reached the top of the fortress wall. The whole town lay at our feet and it was easy to direct each platoon or company to move down particular streets which could readily be pointed out from where I stood on the rampart wall... From where I stood I could watch their progress along each street. As they went along the "tricolours" began to appear from the windows of the houses and the inhabitants poured out into the streets and what a welcome we received from them all!"

- Lieutenant-Colonel Barrowclough

On the other side of the town, Captain Lindsay Inglis commented that his battalion would have made it in first - if it wasn't for the locals plying them with apple brandy and too warm a welcome. Le Quesnoy had fallen, and the story of storming the walls passed into history and legend.

But, for Russell, the key part of this battle was the fact that his leading brigade pushed on through the forest of Mormal, to secure the next river crossing. This advance was the final battle of the New Zealand Division and it was an outstanding success.

Stop 6

Town Square

Already demoralised, once the walls were breached, the Germans promptly surrendered.



French president Poincaré visits New Zealand soldiers after their capture of Le Quesnoy. November 1918. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-013801-G. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22732052>

GPS 50.247182, 3.638219

Getting there from New Zealand Memorial Le Quesnoy

Follow the walking track and you will come to Avenue des Néo-Zélandais which will lead you through the Porte du Château to Place Général Leclerc. From here you can see a church and the clocktower of the Mairie (Town Hall) behind it. Make your way towards these buildings and you will walk through a garden area where the monument aux morts (French war memorial) is located.

Your stop

Stand facing the monument aux morts (French war memorial).

Story

On 5 November, the New Zealand Division was relieved by a British Division - and there was a parade here in Le Quesnoy.

Flags were presented to the town and the town presented a standard to the New Zealand Division. Marshal Petain and Prime Minister George Clemenceau attended and they were part of the grand parade through the town itself. The New Zealanders then withdrew back to Solesmes.

Six days later, word came through about the armistice and the men could barely comprehend that the war was finally over. They also found out - and they weren't particularly happy about it, that as an honour, New Zealand would be tasked with being part of the occupation army in Germany. They were to occupy key bridgeheads across the Rhine to emphasise to Germany that they had lost the war.

The New Zealand Division was to be based in Cologne, and so leading up to Christmas 1918 - it trekked through Belgium, into Luxembourg and then Cologne. In Cologne, there was supposed to be no fraternisation, but the New Zealanders made themselves at home.

The demobilisation of the division began. Men were sent back to New Zealand according to when they enlisted. The only two groups that went back as complete units were the Māori Pioneer Battalion and the Tunnelling Company.

The record of New Zealand achievement is best seen by following the road to the place of their last great success - Le Quesnoy. It's important to recognise what a brilliant division it was.

It was a citizen army, honed by trial and error under an outstanding divisional commander, Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, he forged it into one of the most outstanding divisions in the British armies of the First World War.