

**Private George Huriwaka<sup>©</sup>**  
**Regimental number: 16/1238**  
**New Zealand Pioneer Battalion**

**born: 24 August 1894—died: 6 June 1916**

During the Great War, 98,950 New Zealanders served in New Zealand forces overseas.<sup>1</sup> Private George Huriwaka was one of 2,227 who served in Māori units and one of the 336 Māoris who died in that conflict.<sup>2</sup>

George was born on 24 August 1894 in Matatā, a small community on the Bay of Plenty, North Island, New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> The son of Pene Huriwaka, he was a member of the Te Arawa iwi (iwi = tribe), Ngāti-Rangitihī hapū (hapū= a named division).<sup>4</sup> His mother was most likely TeKoki TeHira.<sup>5</sup> The couple married in the late 1880s and raised 16 children. George (whose Māori name was Kiri Hori) was their fourth son.<sup>6</sup> He was baptized into the Roman Catholic faith and probably attended school in Matatā, achieving the Fourth Educational Standard or higher. Perhaps for economic reasons, by 1915 he was living in Ohinemutu, about 82 km from Matatā. His aunt Kate King lived in nearby Rotorua, where George worked as a farm labourer.

Britain declared war on Germany 4 August 1914 but on the other side of the world in New Zealand, it was 5 August 1914. The Governor, Arthur William de Brito Savile Foljambe, Earl of Liverpool, announced the news at 3 p.m. from the steps of Parliament in Wellington to a crowd of over 12,000, stating that New Zealand was prepared to make any sacrifice to maintain her heritage and birthright.<sup>7</sup>

At the outbreak of the war, imperial policy did not allow indigenous peoples to fight in a war against Europeans. Permission was granted 14 September 1914 for a Māori contingent to form part of New Zealand's war effort. The four Māori Members of Parliament and Sir James Carroll, who although a Māori represented the Gisborne electorate, formed the Native Contingent Committee<sup>8</sup> to recruit and coordinate the formation of a Native Contingent.<sup>9</sup> While some Māori rushed to enlist (about 5.3% of the Māori population of 51,997 enlisted during the war),<sup>10</sup> others refused to fight for the British Crown. (This opposition intensified when conscription, introduced in 1916, was extended to the Māori people on 26 June 1917.)<sup>11</sup>

The 1st Native Contingent of 500 men was organized and trained near Auckland, departing with other New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) units for Egypt on 14 February 1915.<sup>12</sup> In May the Imperial Government suggested that the contingent see active service in Gallipoli, which met with the approval of the New Zealand Government and Māori leaders.<sup>13</sup> On 3 July 1915 the Native Contingent joined the NZEF at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, where it fought with distinction, particularly at Sari Bair (6–21 August 1915). Māori losses were 17 men killed, 89 wounded and 2 missing.<sup>14</sup> Major General Alexander Godley, who commanded the NZEF,<sup>15</sup> expressed concern regarding some of the Native Contingent's commanders; he sent three officers back to New Zealand for disciplinary reasons and broke up the Native Contingent, assigning its companies to various NZEF infantry brigades.<sup>16</sup> Māori leaders and the Native Contingent Committee demanded that the officers be reinstated and that the Māori soldiers be reunited as one unit. With the formation of a New Zealand Division in the British Expeditionary Force in January 1916, Godley was able to accept the Native Contingent Committee's terms.<sup>17</sup> The officers were reinstated and on 20 February 1916, New Zealand Divisional Orders authorized the formation of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, which contained Māori and Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent). It amalgamated the remnants

of the 1st Native Contingent; the 2nd Maori Contingent, which had arrived in Egypt on 19 January 1916; and the depleted regiments, the Otago Mounted Rifles and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles.<sup>18</sup> The decision to include Pākehā reflected the realization that the Native Contingent at its present strength (roughly 500) was not large enough to form an infantry battalion and never would be, given the uncertainty of further recruitment to replace casualties.<sup>19</sup>

Pioneers were armed, trained in infantry tactics and employed in combat roles when not performing engineering tasks, such as installing communication wire, digging trenches and erecting defensive obstacles. Major George Augustus King (from the Auckland Mounted Rifles) was promoted to Colonel and assigned command of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion. Captain Peter H. Buck (aka Te Rangi Hiroa), former Member of Parliament (Northern Māori), was promoted to Major and appointed second in command. The battalion consisted of four companies led by Pākehā and Māori officers. Each company had four platoons, two of which were made up of Māori and two of Pākehā soldiers. The iwi distribution was adhered to as in the 1st Native Contingent.<sup>20</sup>

In New Zealand, recruitment continued among the Māori population between the ages of 21 and 40 years<sup>21</sup> with a maximum weight restriction of 13.5 stone (189 pounds; 85.7 kg)<sup>22</sup> to form a 3rd Māori contingent. On 28 June 1915, George Huriwaka passed the medical examination. Almost 21 years old, he was 5 feet 6¼ inches (168 cm) tall, weighing 140 pounds (64 kg) with brown eyes, black hair and a dark complexion. He had scars on his left hand and knee. He enlisted at Takapuna on 26 October 1915 and signed his attestation form on 27 October 1915 at Narrow Neck Military Camp overlooking Rangitoto Channel, near Auckland. There, he and 111 Maoris were joined by 203 men who, although classified as 148 Niue Islanders and 55 Rarotongans,<sup>23</sup> actually came from various Pacific Islands.<sup>24</sup> Maui Pomare, Member of Parliament (Western Māori) and a member of the Native Contingent Committee, had actively recruited these men. The eight officers commenced training the recruits immediately in platoon and company drills, route marching, musketry, bayonet and assault techniques, and trench digging.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of January, they were deemed ready. On 4 February 1916, Private George Huriwaka, Company A,<sup>26</sup> with soldierly bearing and fixed bayonet, marched with the 3rd Maori Contingent, together with soldiers of the 4th Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade and two sections of No.2 Field Ambulance, through the streets of Auckland to Queen's Wharf. Although there was heavy rain, thousands lined the streets to cheer the troops. Speeches were given by a number of dignitaries. Prime Minister William Massey said that it was a splendid thing to see members of "the Native race coming forward with other soldiers of the Empire under the grand old flag."<sup>27</sup> George Huriwaka and the 3rd Maori Contingent, along with "C" Company of the 4th Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade and No. 2 Field Ambulance, boarded the *Navua* (Transport No. 44) to sail to Egypt at 1 a.m. on 5 February 1916.<sup>28</sup>

The voyage from New Zealand to Egypt took over a month with stops at Albany, West Australia, and Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).<sup>29</sup> The *Navua* arrived at Port Suez, Egypt, on 15 March 1916. Because there was an outbreak of measles during the voyage, 15 Niue Islanders were sent to hospital, and the rest of the contingent went by train to Ismailia. From there they marched over the pontoon bridge at Ferry Post to the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion's camp east of the Suez Canal, arriving on 16 March 1916. Because of the measles outbreak, the remaining members of the 3rd Maori Contingent<sup>30</sup> were put into a quarantine camp about 365 m west of the main camp.

At the time, the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion's principal task was to maintain the trenches 10 km east of the camp. On 20 March, orders were received for the battalion to return to Moascar Camp, Ismailia. Before it departed on 21 March, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and other military officials

inspected the battalion and were entertained by a rousing haka. When the battalion arrived at Moascar Camp, George Huriwaka and the rest of the 3rd Contingent were released from quarantine and assigned to the battalion's companies, where they underwent more solid infantry training. Given the concern that the South Pacific Islanders would not cope well with the European climate, a number of them were reassigned to regiments staying in Egypt. On 3 April, the whole New Zealand Division paraded for General Sir Archibald Murray. The next day, he inspected the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion and expressed his satisfaction of the Battalion's appearance and bearing. Perhaps George Huriwaka was part of the Ngati-Poru and Te Arawa groups that performed a song and dance of greeting. On April 7, George and his fellow soldiers had a last swim in Lake Timsah. The battalion then boarded trains for Port Said. On the morning of 9 April, its 28 officers and 948 other ranks sailed for Europe on board the *Canada*,<sup>31</sup> arriving in Marseilles, France, on 14 April 1916.<sup>32</sup>

From there, the battalion travelled 850 km by train to Steenbecque, France, where they detrained and marched 3 km to dirty billets in Morbecque. The weather was wet and cold; most of the remaining men from the Pacific Islands collapsed and had to be assisted.<sup>33</sup> (Because of illness the remaining Niue soldiers were sent back to New Zealand via England on 30 May 1916.) The battalion would relocate again to Cercus on April 17 and then to Estaires on 1 May 1916. By 15 May, it had moved to billets in a cotton factory just north of Armentières on the river Lys.<sup>34</sup>

The battalion worked primarily in a combat support role (clearing trees, digging trenches, building roads and other logistical tasks) with the occasional raiding party.<sup>35</sup> There were also some social activities, such as a wood chopping competition between Canadian, Australian and New Zealand soldiers on 21 May 1916.<sup>36</sup> The New Zealanders (all Māori) won two of the four contests and were second in the other two. Nonetheless, the overall situation was stressful. Heavy shelling was a day-and-night experience that produced casualties.

Given the stress, crowded unsanitary living conditions and poor diet, illnesses developed. It was estimated that one-third of the deaths in World War I (WW I) were caused by disease.<sup>37</sup> During the period 15 May 1916–14 August 1916, 5 men in the Maori Contingent (aka New Zealand Pioneer Battalion) were killed in action, 7 died from wounds received earlier and 16 died from diseases.<sup>38</sup> On 26 May 1916, an ill George Huriwaka was taken to the No. 2 New Zealand Field Ambulance; the next day he was transferred to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCS), Bailleul, France, suffering from pneumonia. He died at 3:30 a.m. on 6 June 1916.<sup>39</sup>

Private George Huriwaka was buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord, Grave/Memorial Reference II. B. 149.<sup>40</sup> Bailleul, close to the Belgian border, was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several casualty clearing stations, including No. 1 Canadian CCS, were quartered there. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918; they occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when soldiers' remains were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.

Private George Huriwaka was posthumously awarded the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre), and the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918). As next of kin, his father, Pene Huriwaka, received his medals, an Overseas War Gratuity, a parchment scroll and a memorial plaque.

New Zealand has over 500 memorials honouring its WW I dead. George Huriwaka's name is listed on a number of them. However, there was a problem with the spelling of George's last name. The newspapers on 10 June 1916 and the New Zealand Army Casualty Lists spelled his name as

Kuriwaka, although his regimental number 16/1238 was correct.<sup>41</sup> At the unveiling of the Te Arawa War Memorial, Rotorua, on 28 February 1927 to honour the Te Arawa men who fought and died in WW I, Hori Huriwaka (aka George Huriwaka) was listed on the event's program<sup>42</sup> but his name was spelled as Huriwhaka, G. PTE on the war memorial.

In his home town of Matatā, funds for a memorial were collected in 1922 and eventually the Memorial Gates were erected. George Huriwaka's name (spelled correctly) is on the 1914 gate.<sup>43</sup> His name is also on such online sites as the Auckland War Museum Online Cenotaph<sup>44</sup> and the 28 Battalion Roll.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "First World War by the numbers," *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/first-world-war-by-numbers>: accessed 11 February 2018)

<sup>2</sup> "Māori Units of the NZEF," *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/maori-units-nzef>: accessed 6 February 2018). Note: Other sources, such as Timothy Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (Cambridge: University Press 2012), page 264, list the total number of Māori who served in WW 1 at around 2,700.

<sup>3</sup> "Huriwaka, George – WW1 16/1238 – Army," *Archives New Zealand* (<https://www.archway.archives.govt.nz/ViewFullItem.do?code=18051548&digital=yes>: accessed 17 February 2018), entry for George Huriwaka, Military personnel files: AABK 18805 W5541/38, Record no.: 0058298. Note: Unless otherwise noted, all information about George Huriwaka comes from this source. On the attestation form, George gives his birth date as 24 August 1894. He may have been underage. "International Genealogical Index (IGI)," *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:61903/2:1:9VPY-HKS>: accessed 2 March 2018), entry for Kini Hori or George Huriwaka records his birth date as 1896. No documentation was provided to verify this information. Official recording of Māori marriages started in 1911 and births and deaths in 1913. Church sacramental records would have some of this information, but these were not accessible.

<sup>4</sup> "New Zealand, Maori Voter and Electoral Rolls, 1908 & 1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 27 February 2018), entry for Pene Huriwaka, Electoral Year: 1908, Electoral District: Eastern Maori. Note: The hapū for Pene Huriwaka (most likely his father) was listed as Ngāti-Rangitihi and Ngati-Mahi; the hapū for TeKoki TeHira Huriwaka (most likely his mother) was listed as Ngāti-Rangitihi. In the Electoral Year: 1919, Electoral District: Eastern Maori, the hapū for Manuera Huriwaka and Kingi Huriwaka (who were most likely his brothers), was recorded as Ngāti-Rangitihi.

<sup>5</sup> "International Genealogical Index (IGI)," *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:61903/2:1:9VPY-HKS>: accessed 2 March 2018), entry for Kini Hori or George Huriwaka. Note: This source indicated that TeKoki TeHira was George's mother. Although no documentation was provided, this information might be correct. There was a TeKoki Huriwaka living in Matatā. "New Zealand, Maori Voter and Electoral Rolls, 1908 & 1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for TeKoki Huriwaka, Electoral year: 1908, Electoral district: Eastern Maori, page 43, Electoral year: 1919, Electoral district: Eastern Maori, page 38

<sup>6</sup> "International Genealogical Index (IGI)," *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:61903/2:1:9VPY-HKS>: accessed 2 March 2018), entry for Kini Hori or George Huriwaka

<sup>7</sup> "First World War – Overview," *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/first-world-war-overview/origins>: accessed 18 January 2018)

<sup>8</sup> "Māori Units of the NZEF," *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/maori-in-first-world-war/native-contingent>: accessed 17 April 2018)

<sup>9</sup> James Cowan, *The Maoris in the Great War: A History of The New Zealand Native Contingent and Pioneer Battalion: Gallipoli, 1915, France and Flanders, 1916–1918*, (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd. 1926), *New Zealand Electronic Text Collection* (<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-CowMaor.html>: accessed 16 February 2018), page 11

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Winegard, *op. cit.*, page 264

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- <sup>11</sup> “Māori and the First World War,” *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/maori-in-first-world-war/overview>: accessed 16 February 2018)
- <sup>12</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, page 16
- <sup>13</sup> *New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Its Provision and Maintenance*, (Wellington: Marcus F Marks, Government Printer, 1919), *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/files/documents/ww1-stats/provision-and-maintenance.pdf>: accessed 19 February 2018), page 10
- <sup>14</sup> Timothy Winegard, *op. cit.*, page 104
- <sup>15</sup> “Alexander Godley,” *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/ajgodley>: accessed 22 March 2018)
- <sup>16</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, page 59
- <sup>17</sup> Timothy Winegard, *op. cit.*, page 107
- <sup>18</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, page 70
- <sup>19</sup> Timothy Winegard, *op. cit.*, page 103
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, page 10
- <sup>22</sup> Timothy Winegard, *op. cit.*, page 104
- <sup>23</sup> *New Zealand Expeditionary Force: Its Provision and Maintenance*, (Wellington: Marcus F. Marks, Government Printer 1919), (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/files/documents/ww1-stats/provision-and-maintenance.pdf>: accessed 27 March 2018), page 43. “Pacific Islanders in the NZEF,” *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/pacific-islanders-nzef/niueans>: accessed 19 February 2018) **Note:** Actual number varies from source to source.
- <sup>24</sup> Timothy Winegard, *op. cit.*, page 108
- <sup>25</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, page 14
- <sup>26</sup> “New Zealand Army WW1 Nominal Rolls, 1914–1918,” Ancestry ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 5 March 2018), entry for George Huriwahe [*sic*]
- <sup>27</sup> “Parade at Auckland,” *Ashburton Guardian*, 5 February 1916, *Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand* (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers>: accessed 7 February 2018), page 6
- <sup>28</sup> W. S. Austin, *Official History of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade*. (Wellington: L.T. Watkins Ltd., 1924) *New Zealand Electronic Text Collection* (<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH1-NZRI.html>: accessed January 2018), page 61 **Note:** Other sources gave the date as February 6, which might have been when the fleet left New Zealand waters.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, page 62
- <sup>30</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, page 72
- <sup>31</sup> “Titanic Related Ships: Canada,” *Titanic Inquiry Project* (<http://www.titanicinquiry.org/ships/canada.php>: accessed 06 August 2018), **Note:** The *Canada* which was sailing from Portland, Maine to Liverpool was in the same ice field as the *Titanic* on 14 April 1912. Its Captain, R.O. Jones, testified at the British investigation on 14 June 1912 that he received the ice warning wireless messages but kept the *Canada* going at full speed.
- <sup>32</sup> James Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 72–76
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, page 76
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, page 78
- <sup>35</sup> “Famous New Zealanders—No.27—Dr. Peter H. Buck (Te Rangihiroa), D.S.O.: Doctor, Soldier and Ethnologists,” *The New Zealand Railways Magazine*, 10, no. 3 (1 June 1935), page 22, *New Zealand Electronic Text Collection* ([http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Gov10\\_03Rail-t1-body-d8.html](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Gov10_03Rail-t1-body-d8.html): accessed 4 February 2018)
- <sup>36</sup> “Victorious Maoris, Interesting Interlude in War Scene in a Forest,” *Falkirk Herald*, 14 June 1916, *The British Newspaper Archive* (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>: accessed 3 March 2018), page 3
- <sup>37</sup> “How Many People Died in World War 1,” *History on the Net* (<https://www.historyonthenet.com/how-many-people-died-in-ww1/>: accessed 29 March 2018)

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<sup>38</sup> “New Zealand, Army WW1 Casualty Lists, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for George Kuriwaha [sic]. Note: George Huriwaka’s last name was misspelled; regimental number was correct.

<sup>39</sup> “Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916–10 February 1919, a record maintained at No.1 CCCS,” *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 and 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 116

<sup>40</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 26 June 2017), entry for George Huriwaka

<sup>41</sup> “Fallen New Zealanders,” *New Zealand Times*, 20 June 1916, *Papers Past*, *National Library of New Zealand* ([www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers](http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers): accessed 9 March 2018), page 5

<sup>42</sup> “Arawa War Memorial, Rotorua,” *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/arawa-war-memorial-rotorua>: accessed 10 March 2018)

<sup>43</sup> “Matatā War Memorial,” *New Zealand History* (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/matata-war-memorial>: accessed 29 March 2018) Note: George Huriwaka’s name is second from last.

<sup>44</sup> “Online-Cenotaph,” *Auckland War Memorial Museum* (<http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C64072?n=George%20Huriwaka&ordinal=0&from=%2Fwar-memorial%2Fonline-cenotaph%2Fsearch>: accessed 29 March 2018) entry for George Huriwaka

<sup>45</sup> “Battalion Roll,” *28 Māori Battalion* (<https://28maoribattalion.org.nz/roll-ww1/H?page=6>: accessed 29 March 2018), entry for George Huriwaka