

The Quiet Invasion

On a quiet beach in Samoa on 29th August 1914, New Zealand forces went ashore in that century's first amphibious assault and began what is often referred to as the 'quiet invasion'.

100 years later to the day, the National Army Museum in Waiouru opened a new exhibition titled ***"Samoa: A Great and Urgent Imperial Service"*** telling this largely unheralded story of New Zealand seizing German-held Samoa at the start of World War One.

On the night of 6 August 1914, 48 hours after Britain's entry into World War I, His Excellency the Earl of Liverpool, Governor-General of New Zealand, received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies a secret cabled despatch, part of which reads as follows:

"If your Ministers desire, and feel themselves able to seize German wireless station at Samoa, we should feel that this was a great and urgent Imperial service..."

The radio transmitter located in the hills above Apia was capable of sending long-range Morse signals to Berlin. It could also communicate with Germany's large naval fleet (over 90 warships). Britain wanted this threat neutralised and so the day after the despatch, New Zealand pledged their support.

Very quickly a force of nearly 1400, mainly Territorials (Reserves) was assembled. The ships landed at Apia on 29th August and without any resistance took the inland wireless station and settled into life as an occupying garrison.

The New Zealand troops were mainly involved in assisting the civil administrators including the maintenance of postal and telegraph services, a small railway line, hospital services and engineering works.

The German administrators and merchants in Samoa were sent to New Zealand where they were interned on Motuihe Island in the Hauraki Gulf.

Over the next 8 months in Samoa there were some invasion scares including the arrival of a German battleship but no hostilities eventuated and by April 1915 the garrison was replaced by a smaller force of around 300 men.

German-held Samoa became just the 2nd territory (after Togoland, Africa) to fall to the Allies in World War I.

The new exhibition is being displayed in the Thornton Gallery until February 2015. The museum is open daily 9am to 4.30pm, see www.armymuseum.co.nz.