

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 26th August, 2009



Memories of New Zealanders Honoured by the People of Belgium in New Exhibition

Close on 60,000 New Zealanders who traveled from the “uttermost ends of the earth” to the Great War became casualties during the battles for the Western Front.

18 thousand, six times the death toll at Gallipoli, would never return home.

One such soldier, who made the ultimate sacrifice, is Sergeant Dave Gallaher (32513) captain of the 1905 “Original” All Blacks”

“Dave was a man of sterling worth ... girded by great self-determination and self control. He was a valuable friend and could be, I think, a remorseless foe. To us All Blacks his words would often be ‘Give nothing away: take no chances’ ...”

Ernest Booth, member of the 1905 “Original All Blacks”

Dave Gallaher first saw action during the Boer War in South Africa. He enlisted again, after the death of his younger brother, on 25 July 1916 at 40 years of age and was sent overseas.

After training in England he was sent to France and joined 2nd Battalion, Auckland Infantry Regiment ‘in the field’. Despite his age he was extremely fit and often in the thick of the action.

The morning of 4th October 1917 was no exception as the New Zealanders began their assault on Gravenstafel Spur.

A thousand prisoners were taken in the attack for a gain of 1000 metres, in World War 1 terms, a success. But it also cost the New Zealand Division 320 lives, including that of the former All Black captain, Dave Gallaher.

Severely wounded during the assault he was admitted to the No.3 Australian Casualty Clearing Station, but died later that day.

Gallaher is buried at Nine Elms British Cemetery, Poperinghe, Belgium. Officially listed as 41 at his death, he was actually almost 44 years old. He had first lowered his age when volunteering to fight in the South African War in 1901.

A picture of Gallaher’s grave is one of the features in the National Army Museum’s latest exhibition, “Passchendaele - The Belgians Have Not Forgotten”, developed and built by the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917.

It marks New Zealand’s involvement in one of the most devastating conflicts of the First World War, focusing on how memories of the New Zealander’s efforts during the Battle of Passchendaele, continue to occupy a place in the Belgian consciousness, more than 90 years later.

Memorial Museum Curator, Franky Bostyn, says they are particularly pleased the National Army Museum has agreed to host the travelling exhibition.

“We were priviledged, during the 90th commemorations of the Battle of Passchendaele, to host the exquisite exhibition developed by the Museum in Waiouru telling the New Zealand story of the battle and are pleased now to be able to return the favour with a Belgian tribute to the New Zealand sacrifice.”

Franky Bostyn believes the venue could not be more fitting.

“Whilst your country has tended to identify Gallipoli as the key battle of World War 1, the Somme, Messines and Passchendaele also had a profound effect on your small nation.

“It is appropriate that a museum dedicated to military history should host this exhibition honouring New Zealand’s involvement in a campaign which led to your country’s greatest military disaster, but also resulted in some of its greatest successes, without which, the world would have looked very different today.”

The exhibition – Passchendaele: The Belgians Have Not Forgotten - features unique copper sculptures, images and artefacts, audio-visual footage and story panels.

It is open until September 27th.

A diorama depicting attempts to save Dave Gallaher can be seen deep in the bowels of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele, 1917. The scene is part of a replica dugout system modeled on those created by the New Zealanders forced to winter over, underground, where headquarters, communication posts, first aid stations and up to two thousand men were housed.

ENDS:

For more information:

Nicola Bannett

Marketing Manager

National Army Museum

P: 06 387 6911

or

Lauren McKenzie

The Primrose Group (providing communications support to the exhibition)

P: 021 22 66 785

E: lauren@primrose.co.nz

Background:

Dave Gallaher’s passion was rugby.

He was selected for the All Blacks in the 1903 team to Australia.

In 1904, he played against the British Team at Athletic Park and was appointed captain of the 1905 “Original” All Blacks for their tour of Britain & France.

He was a rugged flanker and the team of ‘Colonials’ earned respect for their dazzling style and magnificent record (played 25 games, won 24, lost 1; points for: 747, against: 53).

After retiring from the game he became the sole Auckland selector from 1906 – 1916.

In recent years All Black teams touring France have paid homage to Gallaher at his Belgian grave.



His name lives on in the Gallaher Shield, awarded to the winner of Auckland's premier club competition since 1922.

A more recent trophy, the Dave Gallaher Cup, has been awarded to the winner of the first rugby test between New Zealand and France in each calendar year since 2000.

Dave Gallaher was one of 13 former All Blacks to die during the Great War, 1 in 10, of those who had worn the black jersey during the previous decade. Four of them were killed within a fortnight in June 1917 when the New Zealand Division took part in the assault on the Messines Ridge.

133 international rugby players, including the 13 All Blacks, died during the conflict. Ridge.

Whilst Dave Gallaher was the most famous the other New Zealand rugby representatives to die were:

Albert Downing at Gallipoli, aged 29

Henry Dewar, at Gallipoli, aged 31

Frank Wilson, on the Somme, aged 31

Robert Black, on the Somme, also aged 31

George Sellars, at Messines, aged 31

James Baird; at Messines, aged 23

Reginald Taylor, at Messines, aged 28

James McNeece, at Messines, aged 31

'Jum" Turtill, in France, aged 38

Eric Harper, in Palestine, aged 40

Ernest Dodd, in France, aged 38

Alex Ridland, in France, aged 36

Gallaher's brothers Douglas and Harry who were enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces were also killed in action. A fourth brother was severely wounded in the region of the heart, while a fifth also served overseas.