

The Dutifully Reluctant

NEW ZEALANDERS' APPEALS FOR EXEMPTION FROM CONSCRIPTION, 1916–1918



IN DECEMBER 1918, Daniel Cooper reported on his experiences as chairman of the First Wellington Military Service Board. After outlining the procedures his body had used to determine appeals for exemption from conscription, he went on to discuss the nature of those claims. Two arguments particularly stand out: that only a small proportion of men cited conscientious objections; and that ‘The great majority of appellants had quite legitimate grounds of appeal and in most instances ... were not averse to giving military service’.¹

The historiography of New Zealand’s participation in the First World War has tended to contradict Cooper’s assertions. By discussing conscription almost solely in terms of the groups that opposed it (religious pacifists, militant workers, Irish nationalists and certain Māori iwi and hapū) most studies create an impression that resistance was the dominant response to being called up.² More broadly, Nicholas Boyack suggests the attitudes displayed by conscripts were the direct opposite of those that motivated ‘enthusiastic and keen’ men to volunteer in 1914 and 1915.³ Although James Belich identifies several approaches towards the decision whether to enlist, including ‘dutiful willingness’, ‘overt reluctance’ and ‘covert reluctance’, he still places all eligibles who waited to be called up within the latter two categories.⁴ Only a few scholars have contested the implication that being a conscript meant being unwilling to serve. Graham Hucker, Kathryn Hunter, Steven Loveridge and Gwen Parsons each maintain that many men actually held back for domestic, business or occupational reasons.⁵ Moreover, Paul Baker finds that ‘almost all’ of these individuals expressed a desire to go to the front, but for their existing commitments.⁶

Investigating the rationale behind exemption claims provides a fruitful means of assessing these arguments. Given that men who appealed were trying to delay, or avoid, joining the army, one would expect any widespread unwillingness to serve to be particularly apparent during their hearings. Moreover, the right of appeal was open to all conscripts, with those who exercised it having to defend their claim under questioning by providing evidence of the surrounding circumstances.⁷ As a result, the military service boards’ sittings provide an unparalleled account of how large numbers of New Zealanders reacted to being called up.

This article maximizes the potential of the available sources for exemption hearings. None of the boards' minutes or meeting agendas has survived, meaning that the only way to determine why men chose to appeal is to consult newspaper reports. However, the level of detail in these accounts varies substantially. Some state the grounds cited in terms of the Military Service Act, but others divulge only the oral testimony, and a number contain no information whatsoever on the appellants' motivations. Previous studies have sought to mitigate this issue by conducting either a wide-ranging impressionistic analysis or a statistical survey of one particular area.⁸ Yet the former approach is overly subjective, while the latter may not accurately represent the situation in other parts of the country. The methodology employed here avoids both these problems. Statistics are given wherever possible, cases are only considered if the grounds of appeal were definitely reported as per the Act, and the combined coverage of the consulted newspapers takes in the whole of New Zealand. The resulting sample size of 13,332 appellants far exceeds that of any previous study.⁹

An analysis of this sample contradicts the dominant historiography by identifying a range of attitudes amongst New Zealand conscripts. It demonstrates that conscientious objectors constituted only a small proportion of the boards' workload, with the vast majority of cases being at least outwardly lodged on domestic, business or employment grounds. Furthermore, most appellants insisted they were not averse to performing military service. That the boards refused anyone they perceived as 'shirking' would undoubtedly have led some men to pragmatically conceal their true motivations. Yet the evidence suggests that most were genuinely prepared to go to the front if only their commitments were not holding them back. As these individuals had carefully weighed up the onus to serve against a perceived duty to stay, they constitute a group whose existence has largely gone unrecognized: the 'dutifully reluctant'.

The right to claim exemption was a central feature of New Zealand's Military Service Act. Passed on 1 August 1916, this legislation assigned each of the 21 recruiting districts a monthly quota to be met by volunteers, or by balloted conscripts if numbers were lacking. A First Division of all 'male natural-born British subjects' aged 20 to 46 who were single, widowers without children or married after 1 May 1915 was exhausted initially, followed by the predominantly married men of the Second Division.¹⁰ Every reservist, or his employer on his behalf, could appeal for exemption by posting a prescribed form to the Commandant of the Defence Forces within ten days of his name appearing in the *New Zealand Gazette*.¹¹ The permissible grounds of appeal were ineligibility, incorrect classification, 'undue hardship', 'public interest'

and/or a religious objection to bearing arms.¹² Each case then came before a military service board, which, from the evidence produced, delivered one of several verdicts: dismissed, adjourned for rehearing at a specified date, adjourned sine die (indefinitely) or allowed.¹³

Grounds of Appeal: Conscientious Objections

Very few New Zealand appellants cited conscientious objections to military service. Only 73 objectors were exempted by the time of the Armistice, due in large part to the restrictive wording of the Act.¹⁴ By stipulating that relief could be granted only to pre-war members of a religious body, the ‘tenets and doctrines’ of which declared ‘the bearing of arms and the performance of any combatant service to be contrary to divine revelation’, Parliament deliberately denied relief to most religiously motivated objectors, and to all politically motivated objectors.¹⁵ Indeed, the exempted men came from just three ‘lucky sects’: seven Quakers, 36 Christadelphians and 30 Seventh-Day Adventists.¹⁶ When these figures are combined with the number of refused objectors identified in the newspaper reports, then just 4.76% of the sample appellants cited conscientious objections.

Yet even this low figure requires some major provisos. It includes several individuals who appealed on all the available grounds, but who subsequently made no mention of conscientious scruples during their hearings. This suggests they either misread the appeal form or selected ‘all grounds’ by default.¹⁷ The evidence given by Arthur Longhurst of Wellington revolved entirely around undue hardship and, when questioned by the confused board chairman, he explained that he had left all the grounds in as he ‘did not understand’.¹⁸ Moreover, as conscientious objections were seen as so ‘unusual’, and therefore newsworthy, they tended to be reported in detail, whereas ‘routine’ undue hardship or public interest cases were much more likely to be omitted.¹⁹ Even the decision to begin conscripting Māori residents of the Waikato-Maniapoto Land District from May 1918 did not increase the proportion of appellants who cited conscientious objections.²⁰ In fact, only three Māori men did so, on the basis that the third article of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi had guaranteed New Zealand’s indigenous people the rights of British subjects.²¹ These caveats mean that 4.76% is almost certainly an overstatement of the proportion of cases that were based on conscientious grounds.

Grounds of Appeal: Ineligibility

If so few men advanced moral or political objections to performing military service, what reasons did they give for appealing? Some 9.74% claimed they

were not eligible for conscription, a strikingly high figure that resulted from flawed information gathering. When compiling the rolls for the First and Second Divisions, the government decided against requiring men to submit their particulars in person. Instead it re-used the mailed returns collected under the 1915 National Registration Act, which had required men to furnish their name, age, marital status, number of dependants and occupation, alongside a postal registration of those who had not taken part or whose details had changed in the meantime.²² By allowing men to fill out their own forms, the authorities greatly increased the potential for errors.²³ William Fitzgerald appealed that he had been born on 6 November 1870 and that the Railway Department would be able to verify he was over the 46-year age limit.²⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, Samuel Smyth's mother maintained that her son had not even turned 18 when his name was gazetted, let alone the minimum age of 20.²⁵ Cases like these remained common throughout the conscription period, with one post-war report lamenting that every new ballot 'brought a crop of protests and complaints regarding men who had been drawn and who should not have been drawn'.²⁶ Ineligibility was also cited by those who fell outside the Act's definition of a 'natural-born British subject'. This included Chinese, Indian and Malay residents of New Zealand, men of unnaturalized German or Austro-Hungarian parentage who were deemed to be 'enemy aliens', Māori whose iwi were not subject to conscription, and individuals who were only in the dominion temporarily for business or administrative reasons.

Grounds of Appeal: Wrongly Classified

A further 10.88% of appellants claimed they had been wrongly classified. This was a rare occurrence initially, concerning those men included in the First Division who insisted that they had been married before the 1 May 1915 cut-off date.²⁷ However, the balloting of the Second Division from November 1917 saw a considerable increase in the number of appellants arguing they had been called up prematurely. This arose from the decision to conscript the members of that cohort in sequence according to their number of children. Class A contained married men with no children, Class B married men with one child, Class C married men with two children, and so on.²⁸ Many appellants now maintained they had more children than their classification indicated. Usually the margin of error was only one, although an Okoia man who had been balloted in Class A asserted that he actually had eight children, and could 'bring them all in to-morrow' if the board did not believe him.²⁹ So widespread were complaints of incorrect classification that the exasperated government statistician felt compelled to remind reservists that it was their responsibility to inform his department of any change in circumstances.³⁰

Grounds of Appeal: Undue Hardship

Of the 35.98% of appellants who cited undue hardship, most did so on the basis of family responsibilities. This claim usually focused on the financial or physical support they were providing to relatives. George Cook maintained that his mother was in a weak state of health and asked to be allowed to care for her while the doctors built up her strength.³¹ For Colin Wild only total exemption would suffice, as his weekly wage was essential to the upkeep of an elderly mother and a delicate sister.³² Appellants tended to link these concerns to the roles they had inherited after the enlistment or conscription of their siblings. Charles Howe, a furniture packer from Parnell in Auckland, stressed that having three older brothers in the forces had left him as the only one able to look after their school-aged sisters and elderly parents.³³ In addition, the balloting of the Second Division saw many appellants argue that conscription would leave their wife and children in difficulties.³⁴ The language used during these cases indicates the widespread prevalence of a 'male breadwinner' culture.³⁵ John Casey insisted that his wife and child would simply be unable to subsist without him, while many other individuals balked at the idea of their spouses having to take on paid employment.³⁶ Such concerns were not solely financial, with a large number of appellants asking for a period of grace to see their wife or child through a debilitating illness.³⁷

Business concerns were another regular feature of undue hardship cases. Most of these appellants asserted that their enterprise would no longer be financially viable if they were taken, due to a lack of expertise or replacement manpower. William Hardwick claimed his Hataitai grocery shop was too large for his wife to run alone and that he would be forced to hand it over to the local Chinese, whose young men were not subject to conscription.³⁸ For William Hudner, there was no one else capable of carrying on his undertaking firm, as it was the oldest and largest of its kind in Hamilton.³⁹ Some appellants argued that their difficulties were compounded by their having been found unfit when they had volunteered during the early years of the war. Such claims were often tinged with resentment, as men argued that rejection had prompted them to take on new obligations, which they were now loath to abandon.⁴⁰ Particularly unfortunate in this regard was Reginald Taylor, who informed the First Auckland Board that he had sent his wife to England and sold his home at a loss in order to enter camp with the 19th Reinforcements. However, after undergoing four months' training, he had required an operation for appendicitis and been discharged. Believing this decision to be final, Taylor had brought his wife back to New Zealand and become a fruiterer, only to then be medically reclassified as C1, which made

him liable for overseas service after training in a specially established camp.⁴¹ It is little wonder that the sympathetic board chairman described Taylor's ordeal as one of 'hard luck all through'.⁴²

Most farmers cited a combination of family and business concerns as the basis for their undue hardship appeals. In every case, the testimony revolved around how the farm would be carried on in the man's absence. Two frequent claims were that brothers could not take over as they had gone to the front and that fathers were too old or infirm for strenuous work. Percy Cramp explained that both his brothers were already serving, meaning he would have no choice but to sell his dairy stock if conscripted.⁴³ Likewise, a mother's appeal for George Fiddis centred on the fact that one of his siblings was currently in camp and another had been killed at Gallipoli.⁴⁴ The common attitude towards female relatives was one of distrust in their competence, usually based on a belief that women were not cut out for the rigours of agricultural work.⁴⁵ Similar themes were evident when farmers discussed outside assistance: the war effort had caused a labour shortage and, even when they admitted men were available, farmers were often scornful about their quality. One told of a boy who 'dried half my cows off, although it was in the flush of the season. Some days he milked them at 11, and on other days not at all. He also let them into the garden, and they ate all the shrubs round the house.'⁴⁶ Equally recalcitrant was Patrick Horan, who, when testifying to the indispensability of his son, explained how their previous farm hand had 'tied a jam tin to the cat's tail and it kicked up the very devil; flew around the place, broke all the cups and saucers, and they could not catch it'.⁴⁷

Farmers argued that these issues had left them in a perilous situation. If conscripted they would suffer a major decline in production or be forced to sell up altogether. Most included public interest as part of their appeal and a few emphasized that they would no longer be able to supply food for the war effort. Peter Campbell 'thought he would be doing the country good service by remaining and working the farm', while Leslie Mohring postulated that 'the man who gave his life in the firing line was doing little more than the one who stayed at home and worked hard producing the country's needs'.⁴⁸ Yet the majority of farmers prioritized the undue hardship that would result from losing their livelihood. Farms were portrayed as the only means an individual had of providing for his family, and were also seen as business enterprises into which considerable time and capital had been sunk.⁴⁹ Thomas Mitchell summed up the attitudes of many farmer appellants towards having to relinquish their holdings: 'it would be bung; father would be ruined, the family would [be] ruined, and I would be ruined'.⁵⁰

Grounds of Appeal: Public Interest

Aside from farmers, few personal appeals were lodged on the grounds of public interest. When such cases were heard, they tended to come from self-employed tradesmen, who claimed that the departure of those engaged in the same occupation had greatly increased their own importance to the local community. Harry Proctor asserted that he had many contracts under way owing to a shortage of plumbers in Palmerston North. His statement was corroborated by the borough inspector, who pointed out that only 13 plumbers remained of the 24 in the town before the war.⁵¹

Nevertheless, public interest was the most commonly cited ground of appeal, being raised 51.73% of the time. This ubiquity was primarily the result of the very high volume of cases brought by large-scale employers, or by trade union secretaries who were permitted to act as employers for the purpose of appeals.⁵² Whereas Parsons contends that many such individuals 'declined to apply for mass exemptions', this is strongly contradicted by the evidence.⁵³ By May 1917, the Wellington secretary of the Seamen's Union had already appealed for 164 men, with many other merchant mariners having had claims lodged on their behalf by the major shipping companies.⁵⁴ Sittings in the cities or larger towns regularly witnessed policemen, clerics, civil servants, medical students, seamen, railway workers, coal miners, shearers, slaughtermen or watersiders being appealed for en bloc.⁵⁵ Indeed, the boards immediately became suspicious of anyone from these occupations who lodged only a personal appeal, as they believed a lack of employer endorsement meant that the man could not be considered essential.

Most employers based their public interest appeals on two central arguments. Firstly, that their calling was fundamental to New Zealand's wartime society. Secondly, that previous enlistments had reduced staff to a bare minimum and made replacements impossible to find. The Minister of Police, Alexander Herdman, argued that maintaining 'the safety of the public in New Zealand' required the exemption of every detective and constable.⁵⁶ Similarly, the Wellington manager of the Union Steamship Company stated that the loss of any more marine engineers would compromise his fleet's ability to continue operations that were of vital economic 'importance to the Dominion'. Many qualified men had already gone and enquiries had revealed that replacements were in short supply.⁵⁷ The claims made by the owners of smaller firms also concentrated on these areas. Robert Duckworth's appeal on behalf of Patrick O'Gorman, a Dunedin baker, asserted that five eligibles from his company had already enlisted, leaving him with only two men and a boy. As O'Gorman was the only bread maker, taking him would compel the closure of that side of the business, as repeated efforts to obtain additional labour had proven fruitless.⁵⁸

Reality or Pragmatism?

An unwillingness to join the army certainly extended beyond those who held moral or political qualms, but such resistance was rarely expressed at exemption hearings. There were a few appellants who candidly admitted that they had no wish to serve. Decimus Wells explained his failure to volunteer by stating that 'A soldier's life has no attractions for me', while a spokesman for the five Cody brothers, all farmers at Riversdale, stated that 'none of them was willing to go'.⁵⁹ By the time conscription was introduced, years of casualty lists and exposure to wounded soldiers meant that New Zealanders were generally aware of the war's realities.⁶⁰ As a result, board sittings did not witness the excitement, or the expectation of glorious adventure, that had characterized many attitudes towards military service in 1914.⁶¹ Yet the vast majority of appellants did assert a willingness to do their bit. A small number argued that they could not determine whether their duty to serve outweighed their responsibilities in New Zealand and had appealed so the boards could decide. John Walker submitted several petitions from local settlers testifying to the great importance of his chaff-cutting plant for their farming operations. Nonetheless, he placed himself at the board's discretion, stating, 'if it were decided he should go to the front he was ready to go'.⁶² Likewise, Arthur Playle asserted that his farms would have to be abandoned unless he was given time to arrange his affairs, but offered 'to go into camp to-morrow if you think it best for the country'.⁶³ Some men who claimed they had been called up prematurely also maintained that their appeals were not derived from a resistance to military service. Albert Denham had been balloted shortly before he turned 20 and appealed so that he could have the chance to volunteer.⁶⁴

Easily the largest group of appellants were those who professed a desire to serve, if only they were not being held back by their existing obligations. There were those, particularly employers and some farmers, who based their claims around the work that they were already performing for country or empire. A freezing works operator, Harry Blackie, said he had no objections to active service, but pointed to a patriotic desire to stay and help keep the works going.⁶⁵ Likewise, Jeremiah King believed that he 'ought to stay on the farm in the interests of the milking industry'.⁶⁶ However, for the most part, appellants focused their testimony on personal domestic, business or employment matters.⁶⁷ Andrew Johnston told the Second Otago Board that he 'recognised it was up to him to do his bit for the Empire's cause' and would have enlisted months ago but for the delicate health of his mother.⁶⁸ Similarly, William Green stated that 'If it were not for his mother's sake he would be prepared to go away', while Charles Sneddon insisted, 'It was only

the way [he] was situated that prevented him from going to the front before the ballot', as he worked two farms, was married and provided for his elderly parents.⁶⁹

When assessing the credibility of these statements, Baker's suggestion that appellants might have concealed their unwillingness to serve cannot be entirely discounted. The boards made it plain that they would be vigilant in their efforts to detect 'shirking', 'the slightest hint of which was the kiss of death for an appeal'.⁷⁰ In the light of this, some men could well have exaggerated, or even invented, difficulties in an effort to obtain exemption. One board member sarcastically noted the number of parents who were said to be suffering from rheumatics, while the chairman of the First Otago Board exclaimed that 'the women of New Zealand appeared to be a very frail lot', as 'Almost every statement which appellants put in had to do with invalid mothers and delicate sisters able to do very little work.'⁷¹ Occasionally, the authorities discovered that an individual was definitely guilty of giving false evidence. In February 1917, Vernon Hunt obtained a sine die exemption by stating that, on his brother's enlistment, he had promised to care for their aged parents and work their mother's farm.⁷² Yet Hunt was back before the First Wellington Board a month later, when new evidence forced him to concede that he had been working elsewhere and hardly ever assisted his parents. Pressed for the reasons behind this deceit, Hunt stated, 'As my brother had gone I wished to stay at home.'⁷³ Similarly caught out was Ernest Ward, a Waipara farmer who had been granted exemption on the grounds that his father owned a hotel in Dunedin, and was therefore unable to assist him on the property. However, police evidence was subsequently brought forward showing that the father had in fact sold his interest in the hotel and had been helping out on the farm for some time.⁷⁴

A more common practice would probably have been for appellants to have concealed all, or part, of their true motivation for claiming exemption in favour of grounds that the boards would be inclined to accept. A baker who did not want to go could point out that he was supplying individuals working in essential industries, while a farmer could highlight the importance of maintaining food production for the empire. It is certainly striking that of the 273 conscientious objectors who were imprisoned at the Armistice for refusing to perform military service, about a third had lodged appeals only on the grounds of undue hardship or public interest.⁷⁵ Even four of the famous 'Fourteen' objectors who were forcibly transported to the Western Front did not raise their conscientious scruples.⁷⁶ A final consideration is that many men never had to state their grounds of appeal, as an employer or trade union secretary appeared on their behalf. Some coal miners, waterside workers and merchant seamen probably

held political objections to fighting in a 'capitalist' war but never came before the boards for them to be disclosed.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the extent of these factors is impossible to quantify. Some men would have concealed a reluctance to go in order to give themselves hope of exemption, but there is no way to determine exactly how widespread this practice was. Clearly it is far easier to discover what men did say, rather than what they left unsaid.

Nonetheless, there is a sizable body of evidence that suggests most New Zealand appellants were genuinely willing to perform military service. On the one hand, the fact very few of them expressed outright resistance correlates to the low proportion of men who deliberately evaded their obligations under conscription. Defaulting took two forms: balloted men failed to report for their medical examinations; and men who were passed fit failed to enter camp on the stipulated date.⁷⁸ In an era where extensive surveillance of the population was impossible, and where large parts of the country remained undeveloped or uninhabited, both these avoidance mechanisms stood a reasonable chance of success. Yet they were rarely tried. By November 1918, only 10,545 men had been investigated as possible defaulters, and a further 3500 to 5000 had not registered their details with the authorities.⁷⁹ Several thousand of these individuals were subsequently found to be already serving in the military, to have left New Zealand as civilians, to be seamen, or to be in hospital, in prison or dead. Many others were located without the need for a warrant or an arrest, which suggests they had defaulted by mistake. The most reliable estimate to date is that between 3900 and 8500 men deliberately evaded their responsibilities under conscription; only 2.8% to 6.2% of those who were balloted.⁸⁰

Moreover, the grounds cited by men who appealed for exemption correspond very closely to the results of the 1915 National Register. That survey indicated 58.5% of eligibles were prepared to volunteer for overseas service, 23.2% would serve in a civil capacity in New Zealand and 18.3% would volunteer for neither.⁸¹ This 'early exercise in market research' was far from perfect, but it at least intimated that a majority of men were open to joining the army.⁸² Of greater importance are the reasons given by 8390 single men without dependants who were not prepared to perform any kind of service: 47.5% cited personal concerns and 33.4% business concerns, against only 12.2% who mentioned religious or conscientious objections.⁸³ The latter figure is, of course, higher than the proportion of sample appellants who subsequently advanced religious or conscientious grounds for exemption. However, single men constituted the majority of objectors, and individuals without dependants were far less likely to have significant domestic or business obligations than the overall appellant cohort.

It must also be recognized that not every man who appealed was asking for complete exemption. Around one-fifth of those in the sample merely requested an interlude before they were required at camp. D.W. Robson of Paeroa asked only for a chance 'to arrange my affairs', while James Bennett of Turua stated that he just wanted three months to dispose of his property.⁸⁴ As this figure is restricted to the proportion of cases where such a plea was reported by the newspapers, the true number is almost certainly higher. Indeed, appeals for time to complete farm or contract work, or to sell a business at a good price, were so common that an exasperated member of the First Wellington Board remarked, 'We will have to stop the war for a few months. They all want temporary exemptions.'⁸⁵ Clearly a man who was prepared to be conscripted at some point was considerably less likely to have been opposed to serving than one who did not wish to go at all. Many appellants who argued they had been placed in the wrong class of the Second Division were also likely to have been willing to serve. By choosing to cite this ground of appeal, these individuals were spurning exemption in favour of deferring their calling until a later date. Such appellants seem to have been motivated by the notion that, while they were prepared to go, they did not feel that they should have to do so before men with fewer children.

What of those appellants who asked for total exemption? At the end of the war, the board chairmen gave a unanimous appraisal of the individuals who had appeared before them. Frederick Burgess of the First Auckland body argued that the 'great majority' of appellants had been motivated by concerns of 'real or supposed hardship', and Howell Widdowson wrote that 'almost every case' dealt with by his First Otago Board had been made 'upon what was generally supposed to be good grounds'.⁸⁶ Likewise, James Evans said that most Canterbury appellants 'decidedly were not shirkers', while Frank Hockly of the Second Auckland Board identified a common recognition that it was 'the duty of every fit man of military age to "do his bit"'.⁸⁷ Admittedly, the chairmen might have been inclined to put a positive spin on matters now that the war was won and soldiers were no longer required for the army. Certainly their assertions are somewhat contradicted by statements from board members during sittings, when the willingness of men to go was variously described as 'a pleasant change' and 'refreshing'.⁸⁸ However, as stipendiary magistrates, King's Counsel or barristers, the chairmen were individuals with a vast amount of court experience whose job focused on determining the validity of testimony.⁸⁹ They were thus well placed to comment on the appellants' motivations.

Equally important are the views of the military representatives. As Territorial officers who had been appointed to safeguard the interests of the

Defence Department, and to oppose doubtful claims, these individuals would surely have been quick to identify any widespread reluctance to serve.⁹⁰ Yet the reports they submitted to the Minister of Defence actually suggest the opposite. Major John Conlan, who was attached to the First Auckland Board, asserted that very few appellants had exaggerated or invented their circumstances.⁹¹ For Major Kenneth Gresson, most of the men who claimed exemption in Christchurch and South Canterbury were 'prepared to do their duty and sought no more than time in which to put their affairs in order'.⁹²

Another factor is that some men were exempted against their wishes. Attorney-General Herdman asserted that his decision to appeal for all policemen had not been well received by some, who were 'bitterly disappointed' at being prevented from serving.⁹³ Two officers of the Public Trust wrote to the First Wellington Board to protest at having appeals lodged on their behalf, while Charles West publicly repudiated an employer's claim made by the Hawera County Council because 'he wanted to go into camp'.⁹⁴

A final consideration is that large sections of the New Zealand public regarded appeals as tantamount to 'shirking'. Nearly all of the boards' hearings were conducted in open court, with the newspapers also tending to give full names and addresses for those involved.⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, it was conscientious objectors who were most commonly accused of failing to do their duty by claiming exemption. Yet Matthew Wright's insistence that they 'were the only ones targeted in this way' is contradicted by a wealth of evidence.⁹⁶ The *New Zealand Herald* soon took to reporting cases under the heading 'Reservists' Excuses', a label that would have been endorsed by the *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, which lamented that 'a great many of the appellants have no ground of appeal at all'.⁹⁷ A lack of sympathy was also evident amongst the public, members of whom thronged the galleries at many early sittings.⁹⁸ Board members and military representatives frequently mentioned letters they had received questioning appellants' testimony and citing the 'feeling in the district' that had arisen against the exemption of particular individuals.⁹⁹ Correspondents to local newspapers could be particularly vitriolic. One described any unmarried individual who appealed as 'not worthy of the name of a man', while another lambasted those who were 'selfish and mean enough to offer paltry excuses to the Appeal Board to evade military obligations and take no part in defending our women and children'.¹⁰⁰ As the mobilization of the Second Division drew near, this climate of opinion became even stronger, with the demand that no married man should have to go so long as thousands of singles remained at home.¹⁰¹ Though some who had no desire to fight would have seen this public shaming as an acceptable price to pay for exemption, it might well have dissuaded many others from appealing unless they had a genuine need to do so.

Conclusions

These findings demonstrate that the dominant portrayal of New Zealand's First World War conscripts is in need of modification. Most studies suggest a clear division in attitudes between those men who volunteered and those who were taken under the Military Service Act, with the implication that waiting to be called up invariably signified unwillingness. Of course, conscientious objectors did not wish to join the army and there were almost certainly other individuals who pragmatically concealed their opposition. However, as Baker, Hucker, Hunter, Loveridge and Parsons all found in their respective investigations, the proportion of overt objectors was tiny when compared to the number of men who cited undue hardship or public interest. By taking into account additional measures of willingness, and by considering the views of the board chairmen and the military representatives, this article further asserts that most appellants were being honest when they expressed a desire to serve in the military.

Historians in other parts of the 'British World' have begun to reach similar conclusions. The study of conscription in Britain has long been dominated by the treatment of conscientious objectors, which again creates the impression that resistance was the common response to being called up.¹⁰² More recently, however, a number of local analyses have provided a more rounded assessment. These works unanimously conclude that objectors made up less than 5% of the appellants to individual military service tribunals, with the vast majority of claims being based on domestic, business or occupational circumstances.¹⁰³ The fact that over 8000 case files from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal have now been digitized provides good reason to hope that these findings will be expanded upon in the near future.¹⁰⁴ Although Australian voters rejected conscription in two referendums, John McQuilton has investigated the appeals lodged by single men and widowers without dependants for exemption from compulsory military training. He found that nearly all the claimants in north-eastern Victoria cited family circumstances or the difficulties of maintaining their farms.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Bart Ziino discerned that only 3% of respondents to the Australian 1916 Call to Arms Appeal based their reluctance to volunteer on conscientious or religious reasons. The remainder highlighted the domestic, financial or occupational ties keeping them at home, with many stating that the introduction of conscription would cause them to re-evaluate their stance on enlisting.¹⁰⁶

It seems that the prospect of joining the army forced many men to make a difficult choice between 'their personal sense of obligation to the state at war, to their families, and to themselves'.¹⁰⁷ That some New Zealanders decided to claim exemption from conscription does not necessarily mean they were

against performing military service, but rather that they had prioritized alternative notions of masculine duty.¹⁰⁸ The existence of these ‘dutifully reluctant’ individuals illustrates the inadequacy of drawing rigid distinctions between the ‘willing volunteer’ and the ‘unwilling conscript’.

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NOTES

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1 Cooper to Gray, 10 December 1918, AD 82, Box 3, 1/22, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), Wellington.

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