

RESEARCH REPORT

# More Than A War:

REMEMBERING 1914-1918

Dear Station  
of Kaituma



Dear Willie  
and it is time  
more fully. We  
your Dad is  
will write to you  
Garry & Edmonds  
to the shop yet

More Than A War:  
Remembering 1914-1918

By Sara Donaghey, Sue Berman  
and Nina Seja

ePress



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### This publication may be cited as:

Donaghey, S., Berman, S. and Seja, N. (2016). More Than a War: Remembering 1914-1918. *Unitec ePress*. Retrieved from <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/>

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More Than A War is a multimedia project, to see it in its entirety visit [www.morethanawar.com](http://www.morethanawar.com)

Cover design composite image by Sue Berman, Auckland Libraries

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ISBN 978-1-927214-19-0

# More Than A War: Remembering 1914-1918

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## ABSTRACT

More Than a War: Remembering 1914-1918 presents a creative juxtaposition of digital platforms—a combination of audio, video, archival images, soundscapes, and social media, among others—to tell the stories from 1914–1918 in 2014. It features a collaboration between Unitec (academics and students enabled in digital storytelling technologies and methodologies), oral historians, heritage researchers, and community archivists from Auckland Libraries and Auckland Council. The project More Than A War brought a unique digital voice to the historical record in ways that allow the user to engage interactively with the content. This is a novel direction for digital storytelling in New Zealand, demonstrating the innovative quality of this work. Furthermore, the project significantly enhanced student engagement and learning; their creative responses not only contributed to the practice of transmedia and digital narrative but also to the historical record. Finally, the project exemplified the benefits of successful collaborative partnerships.

## PART 1 - THE PROJECT

### Introduction

The First World War (1914–1918) was one of the most significant events of the 20th century, affecting nearly every New Zealand family; the centenary is being marked by a range of nationwide and international commemorative events. More Than a War: Remembering 1914-1918 brings to life personal narratives of the war years, inspired and

developed by contemporary youth-driven responses to the commemoration of The First World War, with a particular focus on stories from the home front. Students participated by firstly being introduced briefly to the historical context, and then to the tools of digital storytelling practice, research methods, and ethics. They created digital stories from a range of primary and secondary sources; this included archived collections consisting of oral history narratives, letters, manuscripts, and photographs. The students, first and second years studying a Bachelor of Communication degree at Unitec Institute of Technology, were also trained in oral history interview techniques with the supervision and support of the course lecturer and aligned project researchers.

The students constructed narratives and developed their personal—and at many times, emotive—responses to The First World War. This interpretive work is showcased here through digital and multiplatform iterations that infuse the historic with their contemporary reflections. The student learning journey was significant; of particular note is the growth in digital literacies demonstrated by student engagement in the project, coupled with their immersion in historical context. It also encompassed an appreciation of the power of story and the intergenerational dimension of the project as older generations shared their recollections with them. It offered familial memory exchange as grandparents told their grandchildren of the war's impact on their particular family. Students also gained transferable skills of independent research and teamwork, and the project further encouraged the growth of confidence and self-esteem.

The projects had a considerable life beyond the classroom, thus extending the digital stories to a wider community. The resulting archive produced by the students provides future researchers access to a unique range of rich material, including original interviews. The projects have also contributed to the various online resources that mark the centenary of The First World War, including that of the [Ministry of Culture and Heritage](#). Furthermore, the students' productions were featured in an [Auckland Libraries exhibition \[exhibition synopsis\]](#) and in a feature aired on [Radio New Zealand](#). Projects also formed one of a series of community-focused current affairs documentaries broadcast on [SkyTV](#).

# FROM THE HOMEFRONT

VOL 1—NO. 1

THURSDAY JUNE 5TH, 1919

Price 1d Post FREE



PHOTO CREDIT ARMISTICE CELEBRATION, MAIN STREET, 1918, A. K. JOWITT, P. F. B. BURNS, JACOB GEORGE IDENTIFIED REF. P4-49-618. UPPER HUTT PUBLIC LIBRARY, UPPER HUTT, NEW ZEALAND. [HTTP://UHCL.RECOLLECT1.CO.NZ/NODES/VIEW/497](http://uhcl.recollct1.co.nz/nodes/view/497)

REGISTERED AS

Image: Composed by Rhiannon Duff, Poppy Smith, Katie Hay and Pari Sastri Slackhasone for project [From The Homefront](#)

## Background

In New Zealand, commemorations of The First World War cover diverse platforms. [ww100](#) is the official website commemorating the centenary of The First World War with information about a range of projects across Aotearoa. This site reflects the diversity by which people have chosen to reflect and remember.

The most recent oral history study of The First World War in a New Zealand context comprises the reflections of 80 veterans interviewed for [An Awfully Big Adventure: New Zealand World War One](#) oral history archive by journalist Jane Tollerton (2013). First person narratives play a critical part in understanding the described experience of events that are otherwise often devoid of everyday detail and

emotion. In reviewing these records and bringing them to the fore, Tollerton provides an excellent example of the value of oral history recordings as demonstrated in several of the student projects.

Auckland Libraries have actively supported the wider Auckland community to be part of the telling of The First World War family stories by providing [research tools](#), [exhibitions](#), digitised collections and actively [recording oral histories](#) with the children of war veterans individually or at events. Unitec students actively participated in assisting the recordings at these events and the project enjoyed the dedicated support of two intern students. The [Our Boys Our Stories](#) tool was developed in parallel with this collaboration which was aimed at further engagement with the community in collectively recalling and recognising the historical significance of those years.

## Methodology

The idea for the project originated in 2013 from an initial discussion between the Chief Investigator, Dr. Sara Donaghey, and oral historian for Auckland Libraries, Sue Berman. They scoped the possibilities for engaging students in a community-based project using the practice of oral history. After discussing several options, the centennial commemorations of The First World War provided the opportunity for collaboration and engagement. The discipline of communication provided the ideal platform to introduce students to the potential of presenting stories as digital narratives through the practice of oral history. The initiative was also developed by Donaghey and the team as a Unitec-funded research project.

Senior Lecturer Nina Seja had already established innovative assessment based on digital content creation in her courses. Previous courses had asked students to engage with archival sources, emphasized different forms of content development (such as the use of Creative Commons material and matters related to copyright), and the inclusion of personal history in digital narrativity. This interest in new methods of digital pedagogy further extended to transmedia, which became a central component of the framework for the second-year students participating in the More Than a War project. The students comprised two year groups from the Unitec Bachelor of Communication who were studying digital technologies in elective and compulsory courses.

The first-year course (Digital Media and Communication Tools) introduces students to digital technologies as tools for human communication. It shows them how these

technologies are used to design, produce, and deliver communication in specific media such as social networks. Students learn basic digital technology tools to build works of communication in a variety of media. Students worked on three assessments:

- a proposal for the group digital assignment acknowledging the technology/ies they planned to use and how they proposed to integrate oral history into their project.
- an individual digital communication project comprising a digital interpretation of their research process based on the project theme.
- a group digital communication project demonstrating oral history, creative understanding, and digital literacy related to the use of chosen technology/technologies.
- the second-year course (Technology and Media Communication) develops students' understanding of how technological forms are devised, diffused and deployed in global societies, with a particular emphasis on communications media. It provides frameworks for analyzing the political, economic and cultural factors which shape new technological developments and their impact on society, organizations and interpersonal relations.

The assignments related to More Than a War comprised of the following:

- a proposal developing students' theoretical skills for their group digital project, including a justification of their technology/approach, an understanding of their audience, and how their approach assists in building a transmedia narrative.
- a group digital project demonstrating creative use of communication technologies. This project also needed to contribute to developing the transmedia narrative that unified all class projects.

In order to contextualise and provide the necessary guidance for the students in their learning journey, they attended workshops where topic specialists discussed the historical context of The First World War, the practice of oral history interview techniques, and how and where students could locate resources and databases. Students were also introduced to copyright, an understanding of correct protocols for interviewing and collecting information, confidentiality of information and the importance of seeking permissions from participants for the subsequent use of their materials.

## PART 2 - CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### a) Principles of oral narrative

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there” (Hartley, 1953, p.1). This quote is an apt reminder of the subjectivity and diversity that colours any interpretation of history. Oral history is an infinitely varied craft, combining the richness of personal testimony with diverse ways of interpreting the past. In turn, oral narrative has the power to transform the practice of history through permitting multiple interpretations of people and events; it can imbue the minutiae of the past with a new re-visioning. Oral historians emphasise the complex relationship of their craft, the multiple ways of interpreting the past, and the methods of making legitimate histories using oral sources (Perks & Thomson, 2006).

Oral history may be viewed as being two sides of the same coin: participation and audience appreciation. On the one side, it encourages active participation in ‘making the story of history’ by practitioners who may be students, academics, individuals or communities. On the other side, the narrative product has the power to engage an audience in the experiences, both past and present, of the narrator and invite listeners and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator (Reissman, 2008).

Finally, oral history can empower. In particular,

intergenerational projects can be rewarding for all generations; they can be affirming for the elderly that their stories are being heard and are of interest and similarly, they can enhance understanding for the younger generation and create intergenerational respect (Kuhn & McLellan, 2006).

### b) The learning pedagogy

One of the performance indicators of successful student motivation and engagement occurs when a sense of realisation is generated. Kuhn and McLellan discuss the “shining moments” when students come to appreciate their heritage through oral history (Kuhn & McLellan, 2006, p. 475). The practice of oral history can empower students to engage with the subject matter and bring new energy into the classroom by inspiring them. Because oral history has the ability to bring the past to life, it has the power to change students’ perspective of history. This was particularly apparent for those students who conducted interviews with family and community members; they came to appreciate the way the stories they recorded provided a living link to the past.

In terms of pedagogy, oral history energises teaching and can produce those defining moments for both staff and students. Through engaging with the past, students learn to think critically, to contextualise and rationalise information as well as develop skills of historical research (Kuhn & McLellan, 2006). “Oral history similarly breaks down the barriers between the classroom and the community, while



Image: Noelene Mercer recounts stories of her father and father-in-law's connections to The First World War for grandson Sam McLaren's oral history film project. Still from [When Enemies Become Family](#), produced by Sam McLaren, Annabelle Grace and Shaun Constable.

forging stronger ties across the generations” (Kuhn & McLellan, 2006, p. 475).

Benmayer’s experiences (2006) of teaching oral history to tertiary students using digital technologies provides an instructive exemplar. She notes the transformative nature of student learning when information technologies are used interactively and collaboratively, which allowed the students to develop a passion for their project. However, one must bear in mind that technology is always an enabler; a tool that, with careful guidance can “enable, help, enhance, facilitate and promote” (Benmayer, 2006, p. 435). Bass discusses the six kinds of quality learning that can result from using information technologies in the learning and teaching space: distributive learning, authentic tasks and complex enquiry, dialogic learning, constructive learning, public accountability and reflective and critical thinking (Bass, 1997). Furthermore, the use of media technologies has been shown to facilitate the learning process, enhance communication, build teamwork and collaboration, facilitate reflection and interpretation, and enable socially-responsible research (Benmayer, 2006). The role of multimedia in the oral history classroom “enabled and enhanced sharing particular cultural knowledge gained by each student in the field. It also facilitated students’ ability to share responsibility for building a collective analysis that took multiple public forms” (Benmayer 2006, p. 438).

### **c) Transmedia**

The project exemplified the interdisciplinary nature of oral history. While first-year students could develop stand-alone projects in groups, the second-year course required greater complexity of project execution as the students needed to connect their group projects to the broader “story” of the course. Students co-created a narrative structure that required all projects to:

- focus on New Zealand or the South Pacific
- show the effects of war on an individual, a community, or the nation
- be situated within a defined time period

While these appear to be relatively porous criteria, students responded well to restrictions. One remarked: “So those were quite basic rules but they helped shape (the projects) for us.” [See clip 1]. Transmedia is a developing approach to media making. At its core, it extends the storyworld of an individual media artefact (e.g. a film) across more than one platform. However, the story cannot be mere duplication of material; instead, the story must grow richer, so one experiences a deepening of the storyworld. This concept “enhances a central story idea with a variety of media components that

provide additional information, give increased importance to minor characters in the main narrative, or even add new characters that were not in the original story” (Pence, 2012, p. 131). Transmedia is also process-driven: the process of interactivity and collaboration, which places power and trust into the audience’s hands. The audience members move from being receptors to makers of media. In this instance, students not only developed media projects, but also envisaged and set the parameters of the storyworld, thus becoming co-creators of the syllabus. One student group unified all class projects into one core narrative. The group developed a fictional British journalist named Thomas Holloway, who told these New Zealand and Pacific stories in a printed publication ‘[From the Homefront](#)’ and through [social media presence](#), including Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr [see clip 16].

## **PART 3 - THE PROCESS**

### **Research Narrative**

The research narrative is portrayed in the students’ creative responses documenting their research journey in [The student journey](#).

### **Reflecting on the process and its impact**

Students were empowered by the experience and the opportunity to craft and manage their own learning. Of note is the enhancement of digital literacy and technical skills of the Unitec Communication students who also developed a sense of historical awareness of the significance and impact of The First World War. Starting from a baseline of minimal knowledge of the war period, students were able to facilitate their own learning and bring the past to life for themselves and their audience by their unique creative responses that enabled them to relate to and understand this period of history [see clip 5] - even going so far as taking on the persona of their character by dramatising the story and dressing in character [see clip 7]. One of the ways they achieved this was to use a fictional character to tell a story and engage the audience. As one student commented: “The inner monologue helps us to step into somebody else’s shoes and experience it through their eyes” [see clip 8]. Students realised the importance of engaging their audience and developing stories from the voiceless, such as by entering the minds and lives of their characters through the use of drama and its emotional impact in storytelling [see clips 4 and 9]. A number of the projects focused on the students creating tangible artefacts: vintage postcards [see clip 10], an art catalogue [see clip 11], film posters [see clip 12] and a fictional diary [see clip 13].

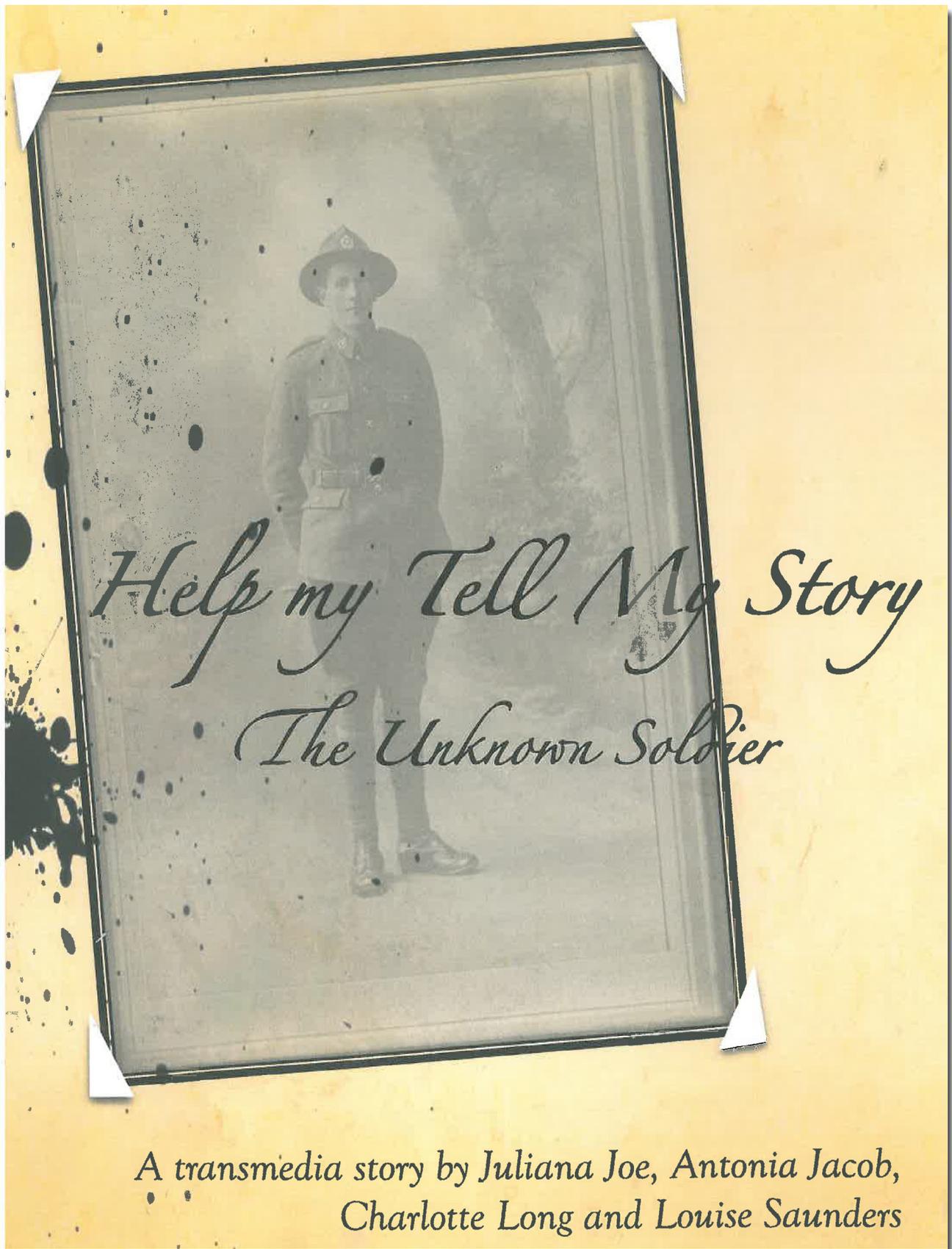


Image: Poster compiled by Julianna Joe, Louise Saunders, Charlotte Long and Antonia Jacob for transmedia, interactive project [Help Me Tell My Story](#)

For some students, there was additional intergenerational engagement through their interviews with (older) family and community members [\[see clip 3\]](#). One group of students chose to tell a story through a contemporary organisation The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [\[see clip 15\]](#). Students acknowledged the challenges of

acquiring new technical skills, of coordination and teamwork [\[see clip 2\]](#), of locating and using primary sources [\[see clip 14\]](#) and but also recognised the learning that they acquired and the enjoyment they experienced through their involvement with the project. The outcome was a unique series of oral narratives –both non-fictional and

fictional—with a distinctive New Zealand quality. These First World War stories captured the experiences, reflections and remembrances of people handed down through generations.

## PART 4 - IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### Impact

The project formed the focus of an exhibition at the West Auckland Research Centre, Waitakere Central Library, Henderson, Auckland that ran successfully for three months September 2014–January 2015. Subsequently, public talks and workshops about the project took place during the 2014 Auckland Heritage Festival. The story of the exhibition and collaboration was published on the Auckland Libraries blog '[Auckland Libraries Stories](#)' which took the project and collection to another audience again. The project also featured on a page on the [ww100 website](#) of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. It featured in a half-hour [broadcast](#) on Radio New Zealand National. Here is a [podcast](#) of the presenter David Steemson discussing the project with Sara Donaghey, Sue Berman and students. It also formed one of a series of community-focused documentaries on Face TV [The Living Community](#) (Sky TV channel 83). You can view the [trailer](#) here.

Further dissemination has occurred in academic settings, primarily focused on oral history and storytelling for social change. This includes the [NOHANZ 2014 conference](#) “The Gift of Memory”, the “Telling Stories” Narrative and Special Interest Network symposium at the University of Auckland in 2014 and the [Oral History Association of Australia Oral History Conference](#) “Fast Forward: Oral History in a Time of Change”, Perth, in 2015.

The students’ digital voice also contributed to the historical record. The project resulted in a diverse range of digital stories, complemented by photographic documentary and community-generated anecdotes that reflected the diverse voices of New Zealand communities. It produced content that is searchable, interactive, and online. Furthermore, the students unedited primary materials were subsequently archived for future reference with Auckland Libraries.

Students were also encouraged to participate in national activities related to The First World War centennial commemorations. This included attending the Anzac Day Dawn Parade and interviewing participants during the filming of [Tony Robinson’s “Tour of Duty”](#) at the Auckland War Memorial Museum – a series broadcast on the History Channel.

Finally, the collaborative nature of the project enhanced Unitec’s engagement with the local community and local government, particularly Auckland Library; these partnerships brought a unique dimension to the project which will continue in the future.

### Acknowledgements

Technical assistance for More Than a War was provided by **Munawwar Naqvi**, Technology Centre Coordinator for the Department of Communication Studies at Unitec and Intern **Arnaud Bailly**, Masters student in Project Management from Universite de Haute Alsace, France. A historian from the Heritage Unit of Auckland Council also contributed to the project by introducing students to historic heritage resources.

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## APPENDICES

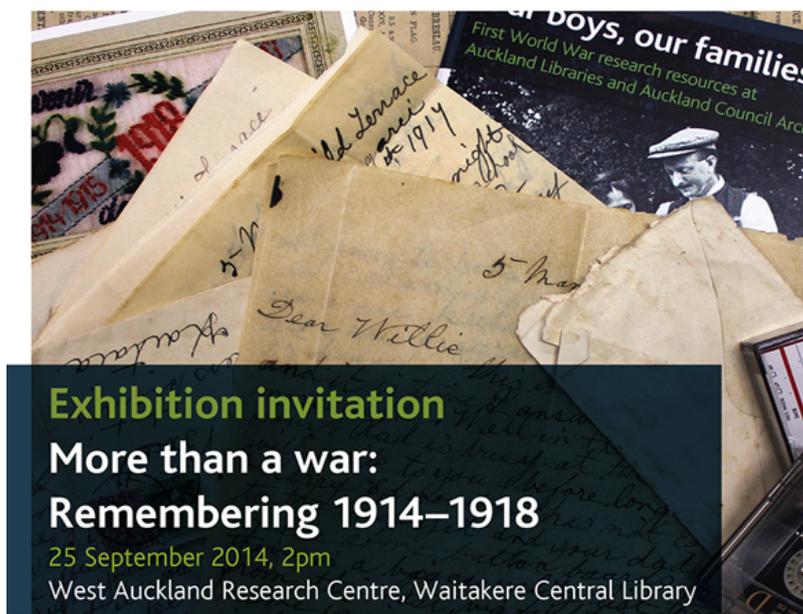
### Exhibition synopsis

Auckland Libraries and Unitec's Communication Studies students present an exciting juxtaposition of multimedia – a combination of audio, video, archival images, soundscapes, and web publishing, to tell the story of the First World War in 2014. The exhibition brings a creative digital youth voice to the impact of the 1914–1918 war years. Students create new memories of this global event, infusing the historic with contemporary interpretations.

The course participants created connections with the experiences of the past by interviewing family members, finding stories in the archives that resonated with them, and contemplating what tales we do not hear about the First World War. Students considered the best methods for recounting and reinterpreting these histories. It may be a digital video, where we can hear the voice of a grandmother recounting the family lineage. It may be iconic photographs captured in an online photo album. It could be a series of postcards with snappily rendered text and evocative images, ready to send through the post. All presentations illuminate the lively ways that students have brought the past to life.

We invite you to view the engaging memorabilia on display, listen to the multiple voices from different generations, and share the imaginative responses of today's generation remembering 1914-1918.

[More-than-a-war-invite:](#)



**Nau mai, haere mai, you are cordially invited to celebrate the opening of *More than a war: Remembering 1914-1918*, an Auckland Libraries and Unitec Department of Communication Studies collaborative multimedia exhibition.**

The exhibition brings to life personal narratives and reflections on the years 1914-1918 showcased as interpretive digital productions.

Please join us at 2pm as we open two exhibitions featuring in the 2014 Heritage Festival. See also *Of the Land: Gems from the Diamond Collection*.

Please RSVP by 22 September to: [sue.berman@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:sue.berman@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

West Auckland Research Centre, Exhibition Space Level 2, Waitakere Central Library, 3 Ratanui Street, Henderson.

► Find out more: phone 09 301 0101 or visit [aucklandlibraries.govt.nz](http://aucklandlibraries.govt.nz)

   
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## About the Authors

### **Dr Sara Donaghey – chief investigator**

Sara Donaghey is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Communication Studies, Unitec, New Zealand. She has a PhD in cultural heritage management and is a specialist in historical research and oral history narratives. She was one of the principal researchers for a project recording the experiences of first generation Dutch immigrants to New Zealand in the 1950s and is currently engaged in a transgenerational research project using oral narratives to inform representations of lesbian identity in New Zealand

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### **Sue Berman – partner investigator**

Sue Berman is the oral historian for Auckland Libraries. Her role as curator supports the creation, interpretation, and management of oral history collections. Sue's work includes the teaching of best practice oral history and research skills. She supports creative digital interpretative work that encourages further interest and access to collections.

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### **Nina Seja – partner investigator**

Nina Seja is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Communication Studies at Unitec. Her areas of specialization include cultural history, and digital media and photography and their intersection with social movements and social justice. Nina was the lecturer and course coordinator for the two courses through which this project was designed and executed.

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