NEW ZEALAND COMMUNICATION TRENCH

Newsletter of the New Zealand Branch,
Western Front Association

1914-1918
REMEMBERING

No 51 - October 2017

A street poster, one of several, at the entrance to Polygon Wood
Wording on the poster above the soldiers helmet:
A unique and powerful moment
of silence and reflection!
Photo: Tim Keenan, April 2017

We remember

The Battle of Broodseinde
The Battle of Passchendaele
The Battle of Beersheba

Notes from the editor

A big thank you to Rob Aspden, Allan and Marilyn Hartley, Tim Keenan, Ian Maxwell, Geoff McMillan, Helen Pollock, Richard Pursehouse and Paul Simadas - all of whom have contributed to the newsletter. Without your enthusiasm for the topics you have written about and your willingness to offer your articles, photos and snippets for the newsletter, there would be no newsletter. Please keep up all this extremely good work! I need everyone to put your thinking caps on and fingers to the keyboard and send me more articles or snippets for the February 2018 *New Zealand Communication Trench*.

A thank you also to Richard Pursehouse for offering to place a poppy wreath on behalf of the New Zealand Branch at the Battle of Messines commemorative service held at Messines in June 2017. Richard has kindly written a detailed and moving account of his experiences over his couple of days at Messines.

Helen Pollock's *Victory Medal* sculpture is now in Messines Town Square and she also attended the commemorations in Messines. I am very grateful that Helen has recorded her experiences for us - of spending three weeks in Messines to install the sculpture, attend the commemoration services at Messines and La Basse-Ville, unveil *Victory Medal* - and for introducing us to her new sculpture in Hawkes Bay.

Reading Helen and Richard's articles makes me even sadder that I was not able to be in Messines in person.

Wreaths at the Stone of Remembrance in the Messines Ridge British Cemetery at the 8.00am service on 7 June 2017, including the poppy wreath placed by Richard Pursehouse on behalf of the New Zealand Branch, Western Front Association.
Photo: Richard Pursehouse

Photos from Western Front: Allan Hartley, a WFA member in the UK, has kindly sent a DVD with photos of headstones of New Zealand soldiers buried in Vaulx Hill Cemetery in France and Klein-Vierstraat British Cemetery in Belgium. Allan is a professional photographer and his photos are excellent. If anyone would like to borrow the DVD, please let me know. Allan and Marilyn have also contributed an article to our newsletter and I would like to thank Allan and Marilyn very much for sending the DVD and for researching the young man who lived in their village, came to New Zealand to live, enlisted in the NZEF and died in Belgium in October 1917.

Battles of Broodseinde and Passchendaele commemorations
4 October:
- A sunset ceremony will be held to mark the centenary of the Battle of Broodseinde, where the New Zealand deaths included All Black captain Dave Gallaher, at Eden Park, commencing at 6.30pm. For more information on events during the day: www.fieldsofremembrance.org.nz

12 October:
- The Passchendaele Society is holding a commemoration service at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. The ceremony will be held in the Hall of Memories at 11.00am.
- A national ceremony will be held at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park, Wellington, at 3.00pm. This will be followed by the unveiling of a memorial gifted to New Zealand by the Belgian Government.
- The Christchurch Memorial RSA is holding a parade and service with wreath-laying at the Bridge of Remembrance. The parade leaves the Hereford Street Bridge at 10.40am and the remembrance service will commence at 11.00am. The Fields of Remembrance Trust will be placing crosses in the Park of Remembrance on the bank of the River Avon near the bridge.

Commemorating Passchendaele-Celebrating Compassion campaign: A follow-up to the note in the June 2017 *New Zealand Communication Trench*. New Zealand's relationship with Belgium was forged not only on the battlefield, but also through efforts at home. In the lead up to the Battle of Passchendaele ww100 are remembering New Zealand's support for Belgium and its refugees during the First World War. Socks were knitted, clothing donated and fundraisers held. By the end of the war New Zealanders had raised around £805,000 for the Belgian Relief Fund (about $100 million today). For their outstanding services in aid of Belgian refugees and the military, 33 woman in New Zealand were recognised by the Belgian government with the Medaille de la Reine Elisabeth (Queen Elisabeth Medal). This campaign has been launched and there is a video and links to more information on www.ww100.govt.nz/compassion.

Deborah D51: Most members will be aware of the story of the finding and restoration of the tank known as Deborah or "The Flesquieres Tank". The 26-ton "female" tank (less heavily armed than the "male" equivalent), was destroyed on the first day of the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917. The tank was buried on the battlefield and recovered in 1998. Since that time, the tank has been sorted in a barn owned by Philippe Gorczynski in Flesquières. In August, Deborah was moved to a new location in the village, to the Cambrai Tank Museum 1917 due to open in November 2017 to commemorate the Battle of Cambrai. Teams of engineers were on hand to ensure that the delicate operation, which had been months in the planning, was successfully completed without mishap. She will form the centre-piece of the new museum, resting close to Flesquières Hill British Cemetery where four of her eight-man crew are buried.

Elizabeth

The Battle of Beersheba, 31 October 1917

Six months after his predecessor's second failure, Lieutenant-General Sir Edmund Allenby drew up an ambitious plan to take Gaza and break through the Ottoman line into southern Palestine. Allenby, a career cavalryman, sought to make the most of his advantage in mounted troops. Mindful of the lack of water and the strength of the Ottoman positions (now defended by the Ottoman Seventh and Eighth Armies), he proposed to attack in three phases over a number of days.

The main thrust would be directed against Beersheba, which would be captured by the Desert Mounted Corps and 20 Corps. The most important goal of this operation was to capture the wells intact. With the horses watered, the second phase would see 21 Corps attack the outer defences of Gaza to pin down the garrison there. Meanwhile, 20 Corps would move against the Hareira–Sheria area while the Desert Mounted Corps captured the wells at Tel el Negile.

Once these objectives were taken the last phase could begin. The Desert Mounted Corps would move westwards to take Huj and reach the coast behind Gaza, cutting off the 46,000 Ottoman troops pinned down along the Gaza–Beersheba axis by 20 and 21 Corps' attacks. Allenby didn't want to just break through the Ottoman line – he wanted to destroy the two armies defending it.

Allenby had been given the extra troops, firepower, supplies and time he needed. In contrast to two earlier battles, British Army Intelligence mounted an elaborate deception operation to convince the Ottoman commanders that the attack on Beersheba was a diversion from the main assault on Gaza.

These preparations paid off when the first phase of the attack began on the morning of 31 October 1917. After an overnight march, three infantry divisions of 20 Corps attacked the main Ottoman defences on the western and south-western outskirts of Beersheba. These attacks kept the bulk of the Ottoman garrison on this side of the town for the rest of the day. Meanwhile, the ANZAC and Australian mounted divisions rode in a wide arc through the Judean foothills east and north-east of Beersheba in order to attack the town from the rear. To do so they first had to capture two redoubts, Tel el Sakaty and Tel el Saba.

Tel el Sakaty was taken around 1.00 pm after a four-hour fight. Tel el Saba, which had been allocated to the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, proved an even tougher nut to crack. It finally fell around 3.00 pm after the ANZAC Mounted Division's reserves and artillery were committed to support the New Zealanders. This unexpected delay caused General Chauvel, who was anxious to secure the wells in Beersheba before nightfall, to take the dramatic step of ordering the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade to attack on horseback straight through the Ottoman trenches and into the town.

At 4.30pm, 500 riders and horses of the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse Regiments thundered headlong towards the enemy with bayonets in hand. Beersheba was secured within an hour. This impressive action stunned the 800 or so Ottoman defenders, who managed to inflict only 67 casualties on the Australian horsemen before being literally overrun and surrendering. As well as providing an epic spectacle, the charge ensured that the wells were secured before nightfall.

This epic charge broke the back of the Ottoman defence. With Beersheba captured, the first phase of the Third Battle of Gaza had been successfully completed.

Source: NZ History website (abridged and slightly edited): www.nzhistory.govt.nz

The entrance to Beersheba War Cemetery: the cemetery contains 1,241 Commonwealth burials, including 31 graves of New Zealanders
Image: www.ww1cemeteries.com.

44614 Private Percy Preston Whitfield

Allan Hartley with research by Marilyn Hartley

When news gradually filtered through to the town of Bentham in the West Riding of Yorkshire, England, it was a particularly sad time as the people of the town learned that on 9 October 1917, three men from the town had been lost and were not going to come home: two men to the mud and bullets of Passchendaele and one at sea.

Percy Preston Whitefield was born on 28 May 1879 at Thornton in Lonsdale, also in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and near Bentham,[1] the youngest of five sons to Francis (Frank) and Annie Whitfield.[2] The family's farm "Bowsber" was near the village of Clapham, a short distance from Thornton in Lonsdale, where Frank was well-known in the farming community.

We are not sure of Percy's pre-war life but it is possible that he worked with his father on the farm, until his father retired. It was possibly after Frank's retirement that Frank and Annie moved to Bentham. It may have also been about this time that Percy decided to emigrate to New Zealand, which he did in October 1910, making his home at Glenmuick (also spelt Glen Muick), a farm near Cheviot in Canterbury, where he worked as a farm hand.

Percy Preston Whitfield

When war broke out Percy enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. There are two Attestation Forms for Percy on his service records held at Archives New Zealand. The first Attestation Form shows that he attested on 18 October 1916. The second (with "Amended Attestation" handwritten along the top), an administrative tidy-up before embarking overseas as Percy had not completed the answers to three questions on his previous Attestation Form, is dated 5 April 1917. Percy started training at Trentham Camp on 8 January 1917 and it is recorded that he was in hospital from 27 January to 31 January 1917.

After training at Trentham Camp, Percy departed from New Zealand on HMNZT No 82 *Pakeha* as a member of C Company, 24th Reinforcements. The men boarded on 14 April 1917 but the sailing of the ship was delayed and the men disembarked on 17 or 18 April. Finally, on 26 April 1917 the men re-embarked and the ship sailed from Wellington. After stopping in Sydney on 2 May for a few days, the ship arrived in Devonport, England, on 28 July 1917.

Percy spent time at Sling Camp near Bulford on the Salisbury Plains in Wiltshire, and during his time in England, he managed to secure leave to see his father in August. His training at Sling Camp completed, Percy left for France on 5 September 1917. More training followed, this time at Etaples and he then joined the New Zealand Division on 15 September 1917, being posted to 12th Company, 3rd Battalion, Canterbury Infantry Regiment.

Prior to Percy's arrival in England, the New Zealand regiments had been busy up and down the Ypres Salient in Belgium, notably at the Battle of Messines, 7 to 14 June. The New Zealanders had a major influence on the success of the battle in dislodging the Germans off the ridge as a softening up blow prior to the start of the Third Battle of Ypres, 31 July to 6 November, better known as the Battle of Passchendaele.

After 15 September, Percy is recorded as being in the field, that field being Passchendaele and it was at Passchendaele that Percy met his fate in the great sea of mud and tangled debris of war when, on 9 October 1917, he was killed in action. That was a particularly bad day when, during deteriorating conditions and strong German resistance, the attack by the II Anzacs failed at the first hurdle with heavy casualties, including Percy.

---

[1] In 1972, the boundaries of many counties in the United Kingdom were changed. Prior to 1972, the towns of Bentham and Thornton in Lonsdale were in the county of the West Riding of Yorkshire – they are now in North Yorkshire.

[2] We have no information of the names of the other sons, where they lived and what they did for a living although Percy is mentioned as being the youngest son, so it is unlikely that his brothers served in the war due to their age. We believe one was a policeman in Morecambe.

Percy's body was not found and is one of the missing whose name is engraved on Panel 2 on the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing in the central apse of the Tyne Cot Memorial, one of 35,000 other Commonwealth soldiers whose names are engraved on the memorial.

News of Percy's death was conveyed to his father Frank who was recorded as living at "Hazeldene" (a house possibly on Station Road), Bentham.

A memorial service took place at St Margaret's Church, Bentham, in November 1917 with the Rev GHC Bartley officiating. Rev Bartley acknowledged Percy's supreme sacrifice, noting that he was well respected throughout the farming community around the Bentham district.

Percy is commemorated on the memorial plaques at St Margaret's Church and High Bentham Methodist Church. He is also commemorated on the memorial plaque, erected after the Second World War, on the wall of the Bentham Town Hall in Station Road, Bentham.

Percy was the 27th Bentham man to be killed. He was 38 years of age.

Memorial plaque on the wall of the Bentham Town Hall
Image: Allan Hartley

Bentham Town Hall, how Percy would have remember it. The memorial plaque is on the wall, to the right of the shuttered door.
Image: Allan Hartley

Sculptures commemorate the centenaries of the Battles of Messines and La Basse-ville, June-July 2017

Helen Pollock

***Victory Medal* and the centenary at Messines**

It was wonderful to experience three weeks in Belgium in the small rural villages on the French-Flemish border. The people have fought their way back from the utter devastation of their countryside following the First World War, to create the prosperous rolling pastureland there now – not unlike rural Southland in New Zealand. They are industrious and community minded. For example: the Belgian Army's involvement in the transport of *Victory Medal* sculpture, the installation of *Victory Medal* by the Messines Volunteer Fire Brigade, and the Mayor of Messines, who in addition to his Mayoral duties (considerable over the centenary period), has a fulltime job as well.

The day after we arrived, having just heard on the plane from New Zealand, that the Belgium Army had just got clearance to cross the border into France and uplift *Victory Medal* from Arras, we met with the Mayor of Messines, Sandy Evrard, and prepared for the army to arrive. Eventually two gigantic army trucks rolled into the Messines Town Square, with eight or so very fit army personnel.

The Belgian Army arriving in Messines Town Square early June 2017
(note the sculpture of the Christmas Truce *in the background)*

By mid- afternoon, the army had unloaded the crated *Victory Medal* and steel, and were gone. Two council staff and four local farmers/volunteers from the Messines Volunteer Fire Brigade, unpacked and installed the artwork, all with little English spoken and temperatures in the 30s. Eventually one farmer brought his giant digger into the square to manoeuvre and level the four very heavy steel quadrants. The 36 pairs of feet were bolted onto the steel to face towards the town centre; the same direction of the advance of the New Zealand troops into Messines a century ago. The sculpture installation was completed with a border of red rose bushes - the Messines symbol of peace - just in time for the 7 June centenary of the Battle of Messines.

The area is crisscrossed with country roads (in addition to giant motorways) and it was not unusual to strike a road block to allow police and the motor cavalcades of VVIPs attending the centenary commemorations through. Prince William attended the Irish/Northern Irish/British commemorations; the New Zealand Governor General, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy, and the Flemish Prime Minister, President Geert Bourgeois, attended the New Zealand commemorations. Very early in the freezing cold morning of 7 June, we were at the centenary commemoration for the New Zealanders, at the Messines Ridge British Cemetery, and the site of the Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing which commemorates over 800 soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force who died in or near Messines in 1917 and 1918 and who have no known grave.

New Zealand Ambassador in Belgium Gregory Andrews, Messines Mayor Sandy Evrard, Governor General Her Excellency the Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy and Helen Pollock at the unveiling of Victory Medal *in Messines Town Square, 7 June 2017.*

At midday, *Victory Medal* was officially unveiled by the New Zealand Governor General, Dame Patsy Reddy, the New Zealand Ambassador in Belgium Gregory Andrews, and the Mayor of Messines, Sandy Evrard, NZDF Chaplain Anthony Hawes, and the RNZ Navy Maori Cultural Advisor, Jack Rudolph, blessed the work in English and te reo. Red roses were laid around the work by the 200 dignitaries attending.

Gary McPheat was present and wrote

> *I live in North Wales in the UK. I was in Ypres for the Messines Ridge centenary commemorations. My Great Grandad was killed on the first day of the battle on 7 June 1917. I met a number of people from New Zealand whilst in Belgium. I was honoured to be in the square at Messines in the company of the Governor General and other dignitaries at the unveiling of* Victory Medal *sculpture. The Chaplain, who stood by me after saying a prayer, suggested I lay a rose on the edge of the sculpture in honour of my Great Grandad. I was deeply moved by this gesture. The friendship shown to me by everyone from New Zealand will live with me forever.*

Victory Medal *in Messines Town Square with the sculpture of the New Zealand soldier in the background.*

The day concluded with a sunset ceremony at the New Zealand Battlefield Memorial, Messines, at 7.30pm. This was a break from tradition in that the ceremony contained a drama and musical performance which eloquently expressed something of the troops' experience. There wouldn't have been a dry eye among the many New Zealanders present.

All of the commemorations were deeply moving for all of us attending, including many descendants of the soldiers who struggled up Messines Ridge and fought and died there in June 1917.

Centenary commemoration at La Basse-Ville

In July 1917, after the Battle of Messines, the New Zealand Division moved approximately 5km south-east to two little villages called La Basse-Ville and Warneton, close to the River Lys which is part of the French border and not far east of Ploegsteert. The New Zealand Division's objective was to hold and strengthen the lines and to create a decoy from the preparations taking place for the Battle of Passchendaele further north. From 26 July, over a period of three weeks, the men holding the line suffered severely from enemy fire and the wet and the mud. There were 1,008 New Zealand lives lost.

In July this year, at La Basse-Ville, a small centenary commemoration for this battle was attended by representatives of the New Zealand Embassy in Belgian.

"The New Zealanders Have Not Forgotten" … on the other side of the world, the Battle of La Basse-Ville was also commemorated in New Zealand for the first time. In Takapau, a remote part of Central Hawkes Bay, I have installed a new sculpture *Jacob's Ladder* commissioned to commemorate a family's great nephew, Private Lance Hardy, who died on 26 July 1917 at La Basse-Ville. He is buried at Mud Corner Cemetery, Warneton.

Jacobs Ladder *at sunrise on 26 July over Blackburn Ridge,*
Lime Terrace, Hawkes Bay
All images: Helen Pollock

Four young men from Hawkes Bay died at La Basse-Ville on 26 July 1917, and nine were wounded. The installation of *Jacob's Ladder* was completed in time for the centenary of their deaths and is sited to face Blackburn Ridge and the farm where Lance Hardy grew up. By coincidence the sun rises over Blackburn Ridge on 26 July and shines directly through the centre of the ladder.

The Hardy family has also propagated 30 azalea bushes for an azalea grove, from an azalea bush planted by Lance Hardy the day before he left for the war in 1916.

Jacob's Ladder and the adjacent memorial grove, poignantly expresses a connection across time – 100 years between then and now; and metaphorically bridges space and distance between both sides of the world, symbolising enduring memory.

Jacob's Ladder is a universal symbol appearing in the world's major religions as an archaic, metaphysical vehicle for ascent and descent, and the soul's journey. The length and height of *Jacob's Ladder* and its lack of visible support, suggest a ladder or stairway to heaven. The name alludes to the biblical Jacob, reputed to have dreamed that angels ascended and descended from a ladder reaching up to heaven. It also represents life, the journey of an individual and the challenge of spiritual and physical ascent and descent.

In this sculpture, *Jacob's Ladder* also represents a simple scaling ladder to climb "over the top", used extensively in the First World War, and requiring courage, commitment and heroism to ascend.

The Commemorative Ceremonies at Messines

Richard Pursehouse

In June 2017, four members of The Chase Project military research group (Richard Pursehouse, Lee Dent, Shaun Caddick and David Dunham) had the honour of attending the centennial commemorations of the capture of Messines Ridge, as guests of the New Zealand High Commission, the New Zealand Embassy in Paris, and the Mayor of Mesen (Messines) Sandy Evrard.

Last Post Ceremony, Menin Gate 6 June 2017

The evening ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres is held to remember all soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient during the Great War, although there are few New Zealand names (most are on memorials to the missing elsewhere – eg New Zealand Memorial to the Missing in Tyne Cot Cemetery and Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing - only those New Zealanders who died while serving in other nations' forces are listed on the Menin Gate). The ceremony has taken place every evening since the Menin Gate was constructed, and at times becomes a specific focal point - sometimes a single flower is placed by a relative, or a wreath is laid by schoolchildren on a trip to the "Flanders Battlefields" or a regiment's ex-servicemen attends the ceremony, there to honour the memory of their predecessors.

The New Zealand dignitaries and NZDF personnel mingled with the crowds. Lee and Richard went over to Brigadier Evan Williams and his wife Kristin whom they had met previously (Cannock Chase ANZAC Day ceremony April 2017 and the Shot at Dawn ceremony in October 2016) and introduced themselves to Lieutenant Colonel Kate Lee NZDF as they had corresponded with her but not met previously. Captain Shaun Fogarty of the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) arrived with the main group of New Zealand servicemen and women, the phalanx having at its vanguard Gunner Elia Fata, wearing a Maori cloak and carrying a ceremonial staff. A short musical interlude and songs added a light relief to the usual formality, the intention being to bring a quintessentially "Kiwi" flavour to the proceedings.

There was a brief explanation about the New Zealand involvement in the salient, and *Now is the Hour* and the National Anthem were sung by those present. Two large wreaths were laid, after which the ceremony was rounded off by the eight immaculately-dressed buglers of the Ypres Volunteer Fire Brigade, who have braved the elements to play the Last Post since the early 1920s (during the Second World War the invading Germans stopped the event, concerned it could become a focal point for dissent). Lee and Richard have been there years before when the turn out on a wet and miserable winter's evening had been barely a policeman to halt the traffic and a man on a bike. This matters not to the buglers, they are there come rain and shine, every night, stoic stalwarts perpetuating this act of remembrance.

Names of "the missing" were read out, as they are every night; when the 54,896 names have all been read out, then the list will be started all over again from the beginning.

The tension of the formal event seemed palpably released after the ceremony was over, as people milled about and chatted, took photographs and Lee and Richard applied gentle pressure on the NZDF personnel to join "us mad Englishmen" early next morning at the foot of the Messines Ridge for a dawn vigil. Strangely enough the comfort of a warm hotel bed was chosen in preference by all but one (equally mad) individual.

Messines Ridge a century on

The next morning Richard, Lee, Shaun and David met with Captain Shaun Fogarty of the Royal New Zealand Navy to experience the exact moment (3.10 am) a century on, that the 19 mines along the Messines Ridge had exploded. The idea had been brought up on a preliminary planning meeting weeks before, where, after a few pints, the germ of the idea had sprouted and flourished. Captain Fogarty had been instrumental (along with Brigadier Evan Williams) in organising our official invitations for the ceremonies and the night before had (possibly reluctantly) confirmed that he would be there "as long as the alarm clock wakes me up."

We parked at the New Zealand Battlefield Memorial on the crest of the ridge (startling the dozing security guard) and began to walk down to where the New Zealand positions had been. As we arrived at Gabion Farm (a farm just behind the New Zealand trenches that looked up the Messines Ridge to where the New Zealand Battlefield Memorial stands today), out of the gloom a figure stirred – Captain Fogarty in his civvies. We shook hands amidst comments of "At least the Navy turned up" and "I see the lightweights aren't here." Cameras were set up on tripods to record and photograph "the moment" and we waited and chatted. Eventually the sky began to lighten, and Erebus, the Greek god of darkness finally released his grip on Eos the god of morning as we began to make out the silhouette of the ridge. As the exact moment neared, we spontaneously joined together in a rendition of Baldrick's Blackadder Goes Forth *The German Guns* poem:

> Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom,
> Boom, Boom, Boom,
> Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom,
> Boom, Boom ….. Boom.

And then we fell silent.

We glanced around, surprised at just how much detail our eyes could detect (the landmark of the Irish Peace Needle to the right had a warning light on top) - a century before, 3.10 am had been selected as the moment when an outstretched hand could be seen. Across these glutinous fields, the New Zealand Division – the Rifle Brigade, and men from the Auckland, Otago, Canterbury and Wellington Regiments – had launched themselves upon the defending Germans. A sombre moment as we tried (and failed) to understand what might have gone through their minds *exactly* one hundred years ago.

Anxiety? Certainly.

Determination? That is answered by the success of the assault.

Fear? Only that they might let their mates down.

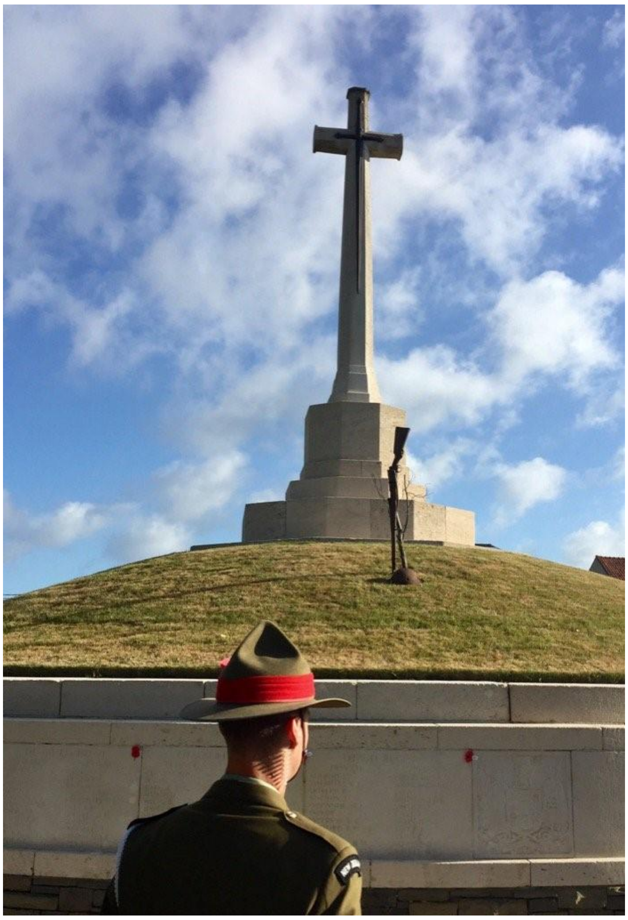
No, we concluded, we could not empathise with them. Yes, we concluded, it was the wind that made our eyes water.

By 3.30 am our beds and stomachs were calling and Captain Fogarty bid us farewell with "Guys, when you suggested this I thought you were all mad, but in years to come I can say 'I was here' and it's been an honour and a privilege to have shared this experience with you."

We did not deny we were mad, and we went our separate ways with a final glance across the fields, half wondering if the ghosts of those who had risen up from their trenches were now at peace. It took us less than two minutes to walk to the car; a century ago the same task to recapture the ridge had taken twelve hours.

The morning National Commemorative Service at Messines Ridge British Cemetery, the site of the Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing

Walking through the very tight security cordon, past the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing at the Messines Ridge British Cemetery (the Portland stone panels have scribed into them 828 names of New Zealanders who died in the area but have no known grave, three quarters of whom died during the fighting in June 1917), we noted an upturned bronze Lee Enfield rifle stuck in the ground with a helmet placed on the ground beside it - in tribute to those names surrounding it on the walls of the memorial.



The Cross of Sacrifice at the Messines Ridge British Cemetery with the rifle and helmet. The panels on the wall in front of the soldier list the 828 names and are part of the Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing.
Image: Richard Pursehouse

We took photographs of the panel inscribed with the name of Private Allan Green of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, who is commemorated in England on the Weeping Cross war memorial near Cannock (refer *New Zealand Communication Trench,* October 2015). We also placed a wreath on the grave of Thomas Jackson from Cannock who served with the 14th ("Jacka's Mob") Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces and who was killed at Messines (his family had lived less than 500 yards from Richard). We had a quick chat with Kristin Williams, who agreed with us that she had made the correct decision to stay in bed and not meet us at Gabion Farm six hours earlier. Captain Shaun Fogarty arrived and looked refreshed and immaculate in his naval uniform. We also managed to speak again with Steven Reynaert from Messines, whom we originally met back in 2007, when we first mentioned there was a "terrain model" of Messines on Cannock Chase.

We were seated in plenty of time for the start of the service. The Official Party arrived headed by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy, Governor General of New Zealand, resplendent in her red suit and an RSA poppy lodged in her black beret. Fern fronds which were placed in an alcove at the front of the Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing and as the party climbed the few steps into the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Messines Ridge British Cemetery (immaculately maintained as always) it was greeted by the NZDF Maori Cultural Group which escorted everyone to the ceremony, again headed by Gunner Elia Fata. The Catafalque Guard took up its position around the Stone of Remembrance (only one hat blew off during the ceremony) and the flag orderlies marched smartly to their position. Special mention has to be made for the incredible determination to maintain the guard and hold the flag perpendicularly throughout – surely there were no teeth left to grind by the end? However, they did not waver in the extremely strong winds at the cemetery, although an occasional surreptitious hand did come up to support the standard bearer.

The brief squall prior to the start had moved on to reveal the Greek goddess Iris, personified as a rainbow, as if the gods had decided it would be just too much to rain on the event. We mentioned to Evan, Kristin and Captain Fogarty that we had last week ordered a few sunny hours from Theoi Meteoroi, the Greek gods of weather, although we had obviously forgotten to mention this to Boreas and Eurus, the Greek gods of wind, for both seemed to have turned up to play with their Norse cousin Loki (god of mischief).

The National Anthems of Belgium and New Zealand (in Maori and English) were sung, exposing those gathered to the incredible voice of Leading Aircraftsman Barbara Graham. Chaplain Paul Stanaway relayed the Opening Prayer and the Prologue was read by His Excellency Mr Gregory Andrews, New Zealand Ambassador to Belgium (in a black and white cloak).

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy followed with the Commemorative Address. Her speech incorporated specific references to men who had died one hundred years ago and she also commented that the day before she had visited the grave of her great uncle Thomas Michael Reddy (26/1179 NZRB) buried at Berks ("Berkshire" abbreviated, pronounced "Barks") Cemetery Extension at nearby Ploegsteert. The Waiata *Ka Maumahara Tonu Tatau* was sung by the NZDF Maori Cultural Group accompanied by the NZDF Band, followed by Barbara Graham singing *I Am My Country*. There were then readings by various representatives from Belgium and New Zealand, including Major General Tim Gall (dressed in a Maori cloak), who also joined in the Waiata *Apopo Ra* sung by the NZDF Maori Cultural Group.

Lieutenant Lucy Naik (Royal New Zealand Nursing Corps) read the Address which focussed on the experiences of the medical staff a century ago, and three Youth Readings were delivered by representatives from Belgium, Germany and New Zealand (Cadet Staff Sergeant Kiriahi McKee), a poignant reflection that perhaps this generation has learnt that wars solve nothing. Prayers for Peace were read by Chaplain Paul Stanaway, and then Dame Patsy Reddy laid the first wreath on the Stone of Remembrance followed by others, including Sandy Evrard, the Mayor of Mesen (Messines). The Ode was read (in Maori by Warrant Officer Toni Tate, in English by Mr Derek Nees, representing the RNZRSA). The Last Post projected across the cemetery, servicemen saluted, flags draped to the ground, the Belgian and New Zealand flags were lowered to half-mast on the two flagpoles in front of the Stone of Remembrance and a "hush" rippled in its wake.

The Rouse signalled the Belgian and New Zealand flags should be raised and Paul Stanaway walked to the lectern to recite the Benediction. The Regimental Colour was marched out, the Vice-Regal Party departed and the Catafalque Guard dismounted, mightily relieved for the respite from the biting wind. The final "official" act was the invitation for individual tributes to be placed on the Stone of Remembrance.

That was our cue. Wreaths on behalf of the Wolverhampton Branch of the Western Front Association, the New Zealand Branch of the Western Front Association, the Dolores Cross Project, the Royal British Legion, The Chase Project and the County of Staffordshire, were placed together in a row. Further along the line a large wreath was placed on behalf of the Otago Boys High School by pupil Teddy George (the NZRB Commander at Messines, Brigadier General Harry Townshend Fulton, was a former pupil).

The ceremony over, everyone made their way to the Mesen Peace Village centre nearby, thankful for some relief from the very strong winds. After much needed nourishment (possibly the largest croissants in the world) at the Mesen Peace Village we went our separate ways and agreed to meet up that evening. Somehow Lee, Richard, Shaun and Dave fitted in a visit to the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, as well as Talbot House (Toc H) and the Shot at Dawn post and cells at Poperinghe, before returning for the finale to the day's events.

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy after laying the first wreath at the Messines Ridge British Cemetery, the site of the Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing.
Image: Shaun Caddick

The headstone at the grave of "A New Zealand Soldier of the Great War"
at the Messines Ridge British Cemetery.
All the New Zealand headstones had a red rose placed on them.
Image: Richard Pursehouse

Sunset Ceremony at the New Zealand Battlefield Memorial, Messines
We arrived at 6.30 pm and once through the security checks (Belgian police, and an advance party of the New Zealand Close Protection Team) we roamed around taking photographs and chatted with Steven Reynaert and others we had spoken to at the previous two ceremonies. The Director of Music, Flight Lieutenant Simon Brew, guided the band through a selection of suitably sombre music until the Kaiarahi, once again headed by Gunner Elia Fata, heralded the arrival of the New Zealand Vice-Regal party, followed by the National Anthems (Belgian and New Zealand) belted out by Leading Aircraftsman Barbara Graham.

The 2nd Canterbury, Nelson, Marlborough and West Coast Regimental Colour is marched on at the New Zealand Battlefield Memorial Messines. Image: New Zealand Defence Force

We had been made aware by Brigadier Williams, Lieutenant Colonel Lee and Captain Fogarty that this ceremony would be a less formal, interpretive dramatization of the capture of the ridge. Nicole Jamieson narrated *The Ridge* which consisted of a musical accompaniment, starting with the Regimental Colour being marched on (representing the men a century ago marching towards Messines), tapping (tunnellers), silence (the battle about to start), and Barbara Graham very movingly singing *Going Home* to *Dvorak's 9th Symphony From the New World*, followed by a nightingale singing (the dawn rising).

Then a pause.

A stentorian BANG resounded (the mines going off) as two base drums were thrashed behind those seated, and three drummers rose to stand in front of the memorial, providing a lesson in synchronised drumming. The rest of the orchestra joined in as the drummers beat a retreat for the Catafalque Guard as it took up its position around the memorial, and a prayer was offered for those killed one hundred years ago. A Shadow Guard - servicemen in First World War uniforms, and a nurse (Lieutenant Lucy Naik), also dressed as if from a century ago - slowly climbed the steps of the memorial, taking up their positions behind the four Catafalque Guards and gently placed their hands on the shoulders of those who stood in front of them with heads bowed, a deeply moving moment implying, "We were here a century ago, you are here today to remember our sacrifice."

The Catafalque and Shadow Guard at the New Zealand Battlefield Memorial, Messines.
Image: New Zealand Defence Force

Chaplain Paul Stanaway read out the Prayer for Peace beginning …

> It's over, it's over. Thank you God that it's over. Through fear and blood victory is won and we who survive give thanks to God for our lives.

The Ode was recited in Maori and English and the Last Post was played by three buglers (representing each of the three branches of the NZDF). The haunting notes, supported quietly by the orchestra in the background, gently ululated over us, past the two adamantine German pillboxes overlooking where the New Zealand trenches in front of Gabion Farm had been, and between which the Flag Orderlies had stood at attention (equally adamantine, and equally up to the task of defying the wind as they had done earlier that morning).

As we observed the Silence the only noise was the still-strong wind in the trees planted over 90 years ago to provide a protective amphitheatre for the cream Portland stone memorial. The Silence was ended with the poem *Attitudes for a New Zealand Poet II* being recited by Nicole Jamieson:

Men of our islands and blood returning
Broken or whole, can still be reticent;
They do not wear that face we are discerning
As in a mirror momentarily lent,
A glitter that might be pride, an ashy glow,
That could be pity, if the shapes would show.
Allen Curnow

We assumed the ceremony was all but complete as the Regimental Colour was marched out, the Catafalque Guard dismounted and applause was followed by "Three cheers for the New Zealand Defence Force". However, Warrant Officer Jack Rudolph thanked (in Maori and English) the "Belgium people for allowing us to honour our fallen comrades" and went on to confirm and remind everyone of the links between Belgium and New Zealand and introduced the Waiata, a beautiful song with almost lullaby-esque qualities. A polite ripple of appreciative applause spontaneously broke out. More servicemen and women joined the singers, lungs were filled, and an electric charge seemed to encompass the area as if Prometheus had once again been up to his tricks. Sensing an invisible, irresistible tsunami of emotion was brewing, Richard moved from his seat and began to walk towards the front, finger poised above the red "record" button on his camera. Major General Tim Gall, Brigadier Williams and Captain Fogarty were amongst officers who stood to receive the challenge. The NZDF haka (written especially for the event) hit us as if someone had opened the front of a blast furnace at an iron foundry.

The applause was cranked up a gear, as the pent-up emotions of the participants were – barely – brought back under control. At the end, even Chaplain Paul Stanaway's demeanour returned to a more appropriate one as he, like the others involved in the haka, straightened his tunic and looked slightly sheepishly around.

It had been an intense experience.

The Vice-Regal Party then departed – no doubt wanting to be first to arrive at the post-ceremony meal at the Mesen Peace Village.

The ceremony over, people started to make their way to the Mesen Peace Village. Within half an hour, everyone had arrived. We mingled with the NZDF personnel, chatting to everyone. Attempting to explain we had never seen a haka performed met with puzzled responses ("surely you've seen the All Blacks?" etc), so we explained, "No, we've never seen a haka LIVE!" Sardonic nods of understanding all around and "Ah, your FIRST". Introductions were made, questions were asked as to why we were over from England, and we expressed what a fantastic day it had been. Everyone thought our dawn vigil idea earlier that day was brilliant, but very relieved they had not been there.

What a day.

The atmosphere was one of "mission accomplished" and everybody mingled in the relaxed surroundings. The Close Protection men were as alert as they had been throughout the two ceremonies, although the sunglasses and earpieces were a giveaway. One of their number, when asked by Lee "I bet you've had your work cut out today?" commented, "Tell me about it, but we have to accept people want to meet …" as he nodded towards Dame Patsy Reddy.

In the queue for food we chatted with Corporal Simon Huia (one of the Catafalque Guards) and Lieutenant Lucy Naik (no longer the nurse whose hand had rested on Simon's shoulder) who questioned why we were over from England and we expressed what a fantastic experience it had been. Simon was very interested in our information and when he gave his name said "Simon. My friends call me Si." He paused and went on, "But *you* can call me Si." This above all represents how we four had been accepted (or at least tolerated) by this close family of servicemen and women and, despite having only just met, it would have been considered impolite not to act as if we had been friends for years.

Lee and Richard by coincidence ended up seated next to Helen Pollock and discussed her *Victory Medal* brass sculpture in the centre of Messines (and her *Falls The Shadow* sculpture we had seen earlier at the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917), which will remain in Messines until the end of the year. Helen and her husband Derek, introduced Lee and Richard to Her Excellency Dame Patsy Reddy and her husband His Excellency Sir David Gascoigne, who were briefly made aware of our research on the New Zealand Rifle Brigade and its time on Cannock Chase. We also discussed her great uncle and his being buried not far from Messines.

We bade our farewells to everyone as by now (midnight) we were seriously flagging yet we managed to squeeze one final memorable moment out of the long, long day. While eating in the main hall, we had heard various songs being played in the foyer provoking spontaneous singing (and dancing). As we left, we turned and stood in front of the exit door of the foyer; the band started up an instrumental version of The Beatles' song *Hey Jude* and everyone joined in – after all, everybody can sing "Na, na, na, nanana na." and the chorus echoed in our ears as we left, a coda that gently faded away as walked back to the car.

A perfect end to a perfectly organised day (the Commemorations Director was Sandra McKie), and we took with us many, many memories that have certainly left an indelible impression that will remain with us forever.

The New Zealand Battlefield Memorial, Messines, 7 June 2017
Image: Richard Pursehouse

Bellringers to commemorate war's end

Elizabeth Morey

[Thanks to Heritage this Month, e-newsletter of Heritage New Zealand, August 2017, for much of the following.]

St Peter's Church, Willis Street, Wellington, has the oldest bells in Wellington, preceded by just a few months by St Matthew-in-the-city in Auckland, which has the oldest peal of bells in the country. The bellringers of St Peter's Church are planning to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War in a very special way.

A memorial at the front of the nave in the church has 24 names from the parish who died in that conflict, two of whom (Lieutenant Oscar Freyberg and Rifleman Paul Milton Freyberg) are brothers of Sir Bernard Freyberg. The bellringers would like to invite the relatives and descendants of those named on the memorial to a special "peace ring" at 11.00am on the 11th day of the 11th month 2018.

The Bells Master, Br Graham-Michoel Wills (brgreen@gmail.com) would love to hear from descendants or relatives of any of the following:

> Private Frederick A Allen, Private Frank A Barton, Private Henry S Bernard, Rifleman George P Crawford, 2nd Lieutenant John S Dagg, Lieutenant John C Dudley, QMS Joseph G Faulkner, Lieutenant Oscar Freyberg, Rifleman Paul M Freyberg, Captain Leslie V Hulbert, 2nd Lieutenant James G Kinvig, Gunner Mark A Lavin, Private Leon G Lawrence, Corporal Eric Lyon, Sergeant William B Millington, Private Sydney H Parsons, 2nd Lieutenant Nathaniel A Pearce, Private Alfred G Petch, Sergeant Ernest N Player, Trooper Wilmot F Powell, 2nd Lieutenant Sydney O Smith, Captain John L Turner MC, Sergeant Frank V Tyerman and Sergeant Thomas C Webb.

Bells for St George's Memorial Church, Ypres

Elizabeth Morey

St George's
Memorial Church Ypres

Anyone who has had the privilege of visiting the town of Ypres and the nearby battlefields will, I hope, have also visited the beautiful and unique St George's Memorial Church, close to the glorious St Martin's Cathedral. This Anglican church was built between 1927 and 1929 on land donated by the town of Ypres as a memorial to the British and Empire soldiers who fought near Ypres - nearly everything in the church has been donated either in memory of a person, a regiment or a division. Brass memorial plaques around the walls are inscribed with every one of the regiments that fought in the area. A plaque to commemorate the men of New Zealand who gave their lives in the war is just inside the door and was erected by the New Zealand Returned Services' Association (now known as the New Zealand Returned and Services Association).

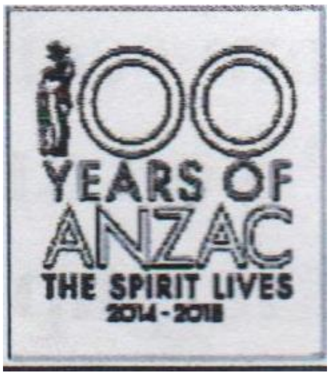
The tower at the church was originally intended to house a peal of English change ringing bells, but funds ran out. Following a recent successful fundraising campaign, eight bells have been cast with individual inscriptions and tuned at the foundry of John Taylor & Company in Loughborough, England. In late August 2017, the bells were taken to the Great Dorset Steam Fair where they were on display on the back of recently-restored First World War Thornycroft and Dennis lorries, before being transported to Belgium - for the last few miles, on the same lorries.

The bells were transported to St George's Memorial Church on Thursday, 31 August, via several Commonwealth War Graves Commission sites, and a service of dedication of the bells was held – the bells were lined up along the floor of the aisle inside the church.

The bells will be hung in the tower during September 2017 and then other work in the tower will be completed ready for the final dedication service which will be held on Sunday, 22 October 2017 when the bells will ring for the first time.

Each bell has a Poppy motif cast around the shoulder. One bell, the 7th bell, is inscribed:

100
YEARS OF
ANZAC
THE SPIRIT LIVES
2014 - 2018



The 7th Bell – the ANZAC bell – at the foundry open day July 2017
Photo: Alan Regin
Source: Great Dorset Steam Fair website www.gdsf.co.uk

The bells on the back of recently-restored First World War Thornycroft and Dennis lorries at the Great Dorset Steam Fair
Photo: Alan Regin
Source: Salisbury Diocesan Guild of Ringers website www.sdgr.org.uk

A present for my Australian grandson: The Menin Gate lions

Tim Keenan

It was on a WFA East Kent Branch visit to the Ypres Salient last May that, after we toured the battlefields, the coach was directed to park in the road beside the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial (most often simply called the Menin Gate). Several of us were most keen to see the famous Menin Gate stone lions that had recently arrived from the Australian War Memorial (AWM) in Canberra. They had been unveiled by members of the Australian military with a huge crowd of their countrymen and women, looking on.

The two lions always stand proudly just inside the entrance of the AWM, where I saw them last November, although I was not aware at the time that they would be paying a return visit to the hallowed town of Ypres. For this special visit, they are mounted on two specially built brick plinths about two meters high in front of the Menin Gate.

A history of the Menin Gate lions

In 1936, two large stone lions were donated to the AWM by the Mayor of the Belgian city of Ypres and were given to the Australian government in the years after the First World War as a gesture of friendship. In exchange the AWM presented to Ypres a bronze casting of Charles Web Gilbert's sculpture *Digger* on behalf of the government and people of Australia.

The exact date of the manufacture of the Menin Gate lions is not known but a date of between 1638 and 1700 is likely. The two stone lions each hold a shield bearing the Coat of Arms of Ypres and, after 1822, stood on the old staircase leading up to the entrance of the Cloth Hall in Ypres.

In 1862, the lions were moved to a new position at the Menin Gate, where they stood on plinths either side of the Gate, one of two entrances into the medieval fortified city. It was through this gate that British and Dominion troops (and many other nationalities) marched off to the battlefields of the Ypres Salient between 1914 and 1918.

During this period the lions were toppled from their plinths by the same shellfire that had reduced most of Ypres to rubble. Both lions were deeply chipped across their backs, and one had lost its right foreleg. The other had been badly damaged on one side of its head, and major damage elsewhere had reduced it to only a head and trunk ending just below the ribcage.

In 1985, the AWM decided to reconstruct the missing pieces of each lion in such a way that it would be obvious what was original and what was reconstructed. The reconstructed portions were designed so that they could be dismantled to return the sculptures to their original state, should that be necessary. The work was done by Kasimiers L. Zywuszko, a Polish-born sculptor, with the assistance of period photographs obtained from Ypres, and was completed in 1987.

After the war, the Menin Gate, which is the eastern entrance to the city. was chosen as the site for a memorial to the thousands of soldiers killed in Belgium during the First World War who have no known grave. The names of the 54,900 missing British and Dominion (but not New Zealand) soldiers are commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, of which 6,187 are Australian. It was designed by Reginald Bloomfield in 1921 and opened on 24 July 1927.

The lions will be returning to their permanent home in Australia at the end of this year.

A present for my grandson

On a further visit to Ypres in June, I noticed one could purchase a special commemorative box set of these lions. They were displayed in a shop in the road which runs up from the town square to the Menin Gate. I duly purchased a set for my eldest grandson in NSW, who is now 11 years old and has an interest in the Great War, which is taught in schools in Australia from the age of five. I am hoping he will be able to have a "show and tell" to his class at school when they arrive in a few weeks' time, having recently posted them to him. I know he will be visiting the AWM with his school in 2018.

The lion on the left hand side of the entrance to the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial

The lion on the right hand side of the entrance to the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial

The Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial showing the two lions on brick plinths: one lion is on the left and the lion on the right is on the very edge of the photo. The memorial was unveiled on 24 July 1927. Field Marshal Plumer made a moving speech which ended with the sentence: "He is not missing; he is here". Images: Tim Keenan, April 1917

Cyril Bassett VC Lookout

Ian Maxwell

Located on Stanley Point, Devonport, is a small park offering suburb views across the Waitemata Harbour to downtown Auckland. The park is named after a local resident who for many years sat quietly within the green space looking out across the city he loved.

His name was Cyril Bassett.

For most of his life Cyril was a banker, however Cyril was also the first and only New Zealander to be awarded the Victoria Cross in the Gallipoli Campaign.

Five years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Cyril joined the Auckland College Rifles as a reserve or territorial soldier. In 1911, he transferred to the Signal Company of the Auckland Division. In October 1914, he embarked with the Main Body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and was a sapper, an engineer with the Corps of New Zealand Engineers assigned to the Divisional Signal Company.

On 25 April 1915, he landed at Gallipoli and set to work laying communication lines. Cyril moved between the front line and rear areas, often exposed and in the open, laying and repairing the wires which linked field telephones. This was essential work as it enabled front line commanders to call in artillery support, reinforcements and supplies. The work was also extremely dangerous.

In August 1915, Cyril supported the attack on Chunuk Bair. The battle raged for three days and Cyril and his team of five signallers laid down and maintained telephone lines to the front line. He faced continuous gunfire and two bullets passed through his clothing.

Detail from the huge diorama on display at the Great War Exhibition in Wellington showing Basset hauling telephone cable up Chunuk Bair
Image: Ian Maxwell

The citation for Bassett's Victoria Cross reads as follows:

> No 4/515 Corporal Cyril Royston Guyton Bassett, New Zealand Divisional Signal Company. For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on the Chunuk Bair ridge in the Gallipoli Peninsula on 7th August, 1915. After the New Zealand Infantry Brigade had attacked and established itself on the ridge, Corporal Bassett, in full daylight and under a continuous and heavy fire, succeeded in laying a telephone line from the old position to the new one on Chunuk Bair. He has subsequently been brought to notice for further excellent and most gallant work connected with the repair of telephone lines by day and night under heavy fire.
> *The London Gazette*, No. 29238, 15 October 1915.

Cyril Bassett (center) at Buckingham Palace after receiving his Victoria Cross
Image: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19160323-50-3

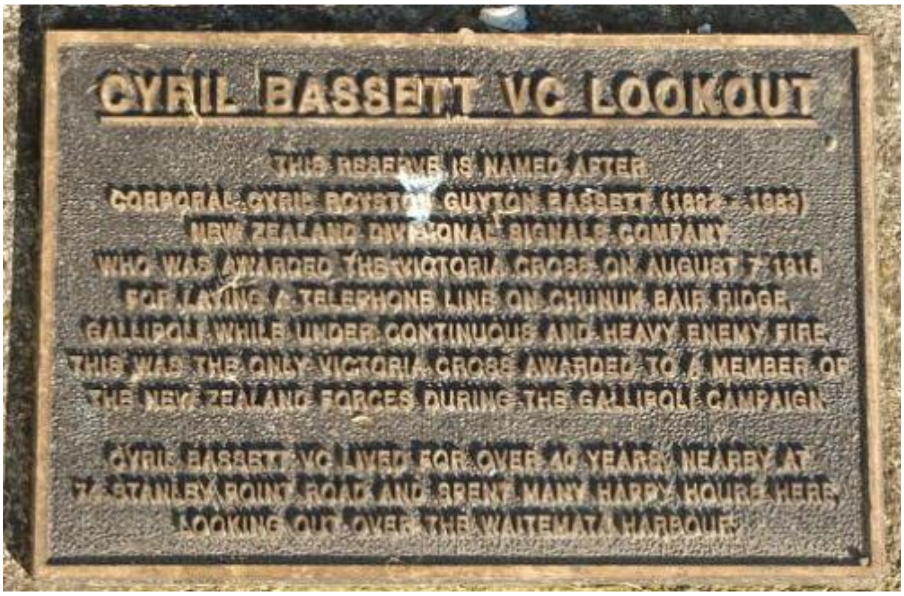
Shortly after the battle Cyril was evacuated due to poor health. In June 1916, he rejoined his unit, then on the Western Front in France. He was commissioned and served throughout the war. During this period he was wounded twice and fought in the Battle of the Somme.

Cyril returned to New Zealand in late 1918. During the Second World War he served again, still in Signals but this time at home in New Zealand.

Cyril was a quiet man. He never spoke of his achievements and he thought his award undeserved given what others had been through. He raised a family, sailed yachts and was an active member of the Devonport community through until his death in 1983 aged 91.

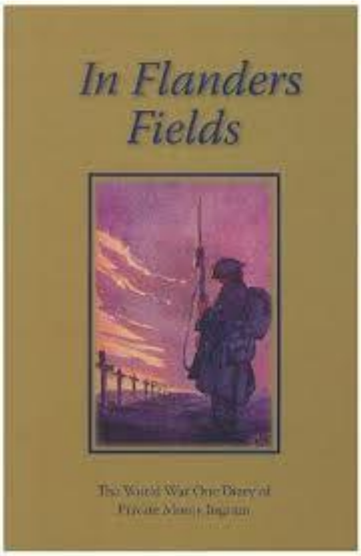
Today his medals are displayed by the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

In October 2017, the Cyril Bassett VC Lookout will get a small makeover. The plaque will be reset and the seats replaced. Part of the works funded by the ANZ bank – in recognition of the contribution Cyril had made to the nation and their bank.



The plaque marking Cyril Basset VC Lookout, Stanley Point, Devonport
Image: Ian Maxwell

After Passchendaele: Monty Ingram's experience of hell in October 1917



The following account records Monty's experience on the night of the 19/20 October 1917 after his company (the Ruahine Company of the 3rd Wellington Battalion) had at last been relieved at the front line having been there since 11 October and having participated in the Passchendaele disaster. This extract gives a horrific picture of the conditions in which they were fighting. Although Monty experienced hell, he survived the war and returned to New Zealand and died in 1976.

Rob Aspden has contributed this extract from the book *In Flanders Fields: The First World War Diary of Private Monty Ingram*, published by David Ling Publishing Ltd, 2006, pp82-86. Rob has contacted Monty's son, Neil Ingram, and Neil has very generously given permission for these pages from his father's diary to be published in the October 2017 *New Zealand Communication Trench*.

"26th October: Gee! this is great! Here am I lying on a *mattress*, on a *bed*, between lovely clean, cool, white *sheets!!* am just revelling in an ecstasy of cleanliness, comfort and rest, and War seems remote and the past month but a dream.

“I am a patient of the Fulham Military Hospital, Hammersmith, London. Before I reached this haven of rest, however, I went through Hell and suffered the torments of the damned, and I consider myself extremely lucky to be alive today, let alone to be snugly ensconced in such comfort.

“I shall endeavour to record my experiences over the past week, though, Heaven knows, any attempt of mine at describing the return from the front line cannot, ever so slightly, approach the awful reality.

“On the night of the 19th our relief duly arrived. The terrible journey out to us, through the morass of mud, had well nigh exhausted the men of the relief, and on reaching us they slithered down into our trench almost at the end of their resources. Our Company wasted no time in starting off rearwards, and with old 'Bully' Williams, our O.C., leading, we set out in single file to wind our way, through the black night, over the three miles of liquid landscape. Weak from the effects of the exhausting conditions we had endured during the past fortnight it was not long before we were in serious difficulties.

“Men were continually slipping and sliding into water-filled shellholes, sinking to their waists and sometimes to their armpits. Unable to extricate themselves they called to others to help them, and it was only with the greatest difficulty, and at the expense of fast diminishing reserves of strength, that this was accomplished.

“We had not gone far when, whilst passing a shell shattered tree, I espied the dim form of a man squatting aheap in the fork of the blasted trunk. On investigating I discover that he is fast asleep. Rousing him, with difficulty, to find if he is one of our Company, I learn that he is one of the relief, too exhausted to move any further forward. He is left to slumber on, till daylight exposes him to the Hun, and machinegun bullets spur his tired limbs to hastily seek cover.

“As we struggled on, the long straggling line ever stretching longer, there were so many men getting bogged that of necessity they were left to extricate themselves the best way they could. We were losing all feeling for one another, it was ‘every man for himself’. Personally, I was aching in every joint, a numbing pain enveloped me from head to feet and wearily I dragged one leg after another, the gumboots seemingly weighted with lead like the boots of divers. Never, in the whole course of my twenty- one years, was I so utterly weary, and I staggered on mechanically and semiconsciously.

“Floundering along in the rear of the long file, with the Lewis-gun, in its jacket, on my shoulder, by Herculean effort I was keeping in touch with the next man ahead, when FLOP! I floundered into a cold, wet, liquid-filled shell crater. Sinking till the level of the evil mire was up to my middle, I had awful visions of being completely engulfed forever in this foul liquid earth. Struggling frantically to wade out I found my legs immovably held by the suction, and worse I was still sinking. Hell! What an end! Throwing the upper portion of my body as far forward as it was possible, and stretching out my arms to their utmost limit, I found I was able to dig my fingers into the firmer mud that formed the lip of the crater, then wriggling and worming I drew myself on face and stomach, slowly but surely to the edge and clambered out. Minus, however, the gumboots which remained immovably embedded; the suction was too great, and my strength too low for the necessary exertion to retrieve them.

“Feeling about in the darkness, I located the Lewis-gun, and after rolling my trousers up to the knees, I once more staggered forward, now barefooted, in the wake of the Company which I thought I could dimly hear, ahead of me, in the distance. Handicapped with the gun, my progress was too slow, however, for me to catch up and I soon lost all touch with the Company, and was floundering about alone, in my misery and helplessness.

“Wet to the skin, shiveringly cold, and paddling through seas of slime in absolute blackness broken only by the occasional gleams of bursting shells, as the spurts of flame leapt up like fountains, I stumbled, slithered and staggered painfully onward. Here and there I passed huddled forms of some of my Company who lay asleep where they had dropped from utter exhaustion, unable to move another step forward. Lucky would be those who found themselves alive on the morrow. Sleep seemed more desirable than Heaven, and I was sorely tempted to fall beside them and meet their fate, but the natural instinct of self-preservation forced me on.

“I was now suffering agony from my unshod feet, the soles of which were continually being punctured as I trod on strands of barbed-wire and splinters of shell, as sharp as razors, embedded in the mud. Frequently, after treading on a barb, I would stop to lift a foot, to squeeze it tightly and thus ease the pain, then stepping forward again, would immediately have a foot deeply pierced by another. The tortures of the old Spanish Inquisition were surely no greater than those from which I was suffering.

“I was done, dead beat, and could easily have wept from the pain of my muddy, bleeding feet and the utter exhaustion of body, mind and soul; but, somehow or other, I still staggered onward, at times measuring my full length in the mud and, with great effort, raising myself to my knees, then slowly to my feet and onward again. Of my whereabouts, I had not the faintest idea, but instinct seemed to guide me in the right direction for eventually I came upon a broad white tape laid out on the ground as a guide which I followed for what seemed eternity, seeing and hearing no one, just an automaton without sensibility.

“At long last, when completely at the end of my resources and stamina, I struck a duckwalk where I sat and rested awhile before forcing my numbed body to further effort. The knowledge that I was now finished with the mud and its horrors, and was on a firm track that would lead me directly out, heartened me considerably, and throwing the huge block of mud, that represented my gun, on to my shoulder, I called on myself for a final effort and staggered on down the duckwalk.

“The duckwalk did not prove to be the nice firm track I expected, the track, here and there, having been broken up by shell fire or sunken beneath the oozing surface of the ground. Still, the narrow two foot-wide, wooden track, was the only way out. To move off it was to perish miserably by drowning in the swamp of stinking shell holes, though to remain on it was to incur, at every yard, the risk of a direct hit, for each bend and twist of the track was known to the Hun, and sundry gaps recently made were there to prove the accuracy of his shooting.

“However, I managed to surmount all obstacles and trudging on as in a dream eventually sighted lights and heard voices. The voices seemed to be coming from a point about 200 yards on my left and yelling at the full extent of my lungs, 'Is that Ruahine Company', I received an affirmative reply and stepping off the duckwalk to make my way thither I immediately collapsed into the rotting, stinking body of a long dead mule. The foul thing seemed to embrace me as I lay outstretched amid its loathsome decomposed body, half sunken in the mud. My cup of bitterness was indeed full and words cannot describe my feelings at that moment; suffice it to say I reached the Company where they were bivouaced in bivvies dug, and since vacated, by other troops. They were practically all fast asleep after having partaken of a hot meal which had been prepared by the Company cooks. How deeply I envied them lying at full length, with full stomachs, in profound slumber. In the darkness, and in the exhausted state I was in, it was impossible to find a shelter, even if there was one vacant, so I flopped down in a slight depression in a comparative dry bit of ground and was immediately fast asleep. Not for long, however. The Sergeant-major, prowling about to see that everyone was 'set' for the night, discovered me lying there and rousing me with difficulty led me to the cookhouse where he found some tea left over, but nothing to eat. That mug of tea was the best drink I have taken since I learnt to swallow. It seemed both meat and drink to me and wonderfully stimulating. Enquiring the hour of the Sergeant-major, I learnt that it was 2 a.m. I had spent four hours floundering through Hell!

“The S.M. then poked me into a small bivvie, dug into a bank where two others were already ensconced and snoring. It was a tight fit but I wedged my way in, and lying on the damp mud that was bed, mattress and sheet, was soon fast asleep in my drenched and muddy clothes.

“I awoke some hours later, and as the sun was at long last shining, bestirred myself so that I might get out and dry my saturated clothes. On attempting to raise my head it seemed as though someone was forcibly holding it down by the hair. Giving a violent wrench and a twist I jerked it up to discover that the wet mud which had served me as a pillow had dried with the heat of my head and the hair had become matted and set in the mud like fibrous plaster. A large cake of dry mud came away with my head, as I tore it free, and sat like a plate on the back of my cranium.

“My feet and my legs from the knees down, were encased in half an inch of dried mud which was set around them like a Plaster-of-Paris jacket. The play of the muscles had cracked the casing in many places and I endeavoured to pull pieces off with my fingers, but painfully discovered that the hair on the legs held them close. I tried cutting the hair with a pair of scissors but this method being exceedingly slow and tedious I hobbled over to an old shell crater which was full of rancid water and coated over with a green floating scum, and there I washed my legs and also my face which was enveloped in a veneer of dried mud.

“The few yards to the shell crater was rather a painful journey as my legs had been badly cut by the barbed wire during my nightmare return from the line last night, and blood poisoning seemed to be rapidly developing. One leg especially was badly swollen and it was possible to make a deep hole in the shin by simply pushing the tip of a finger in. On removing the finger the hole remained - just as one can poke in a pound of butter.

“Later in the day, the pain and swelling becoming worse, I was taken before the Battalion Medical Officer (carried on the back of a comrade), who marked me for the Field Ambulance Station. Our Division was now in the process of being relieved by a Canadian one and the Ambulance Station had already been taken over. The Canadian M.O., before who I appeared, never even glanced at my leg but, after hastily perusing my ticket, immediately marked me for 2nd Anzac Corps Rest Station. Apparently everyone was treated alike for two motor ambulances full of Diggers set out in the gloaming for the C.R.S.”

- -

Monty returned to France on 23 March 1918, just two days after the start of the big German offensive which took the New Zealand Division from Flanders to the Somme. There he eventually joined up with the Taranaki Company of the 2nd Wellington Battalion, since the 3rd Battalion no longer existed, and continued with the Division as they moved through to victory

42110 Private Neil Montague Ingram,
Wellington Infantry Regiment

Machine guns on the Western Front

Paul Simadas, RFD Lieutenant Colonel, Chairman Australian Branch, Western Front Association

In 1917, the employment of medium machine guns by the British Empire forces on the Western Front reached a highly sophisticated level of use. The British forces used both the Lewis gun and Vickers machine gun on the Western Front to ever increasing lethal effect on the battlefield.

The lighter Lewis gun was mainly used within the infantry battalions of the British Expeditionary Forces, including the AIF and the NZEF. The medium Vickers machine gun with its higher rate of fire and increased range were concentrated into separate machine gun companies in 1916, and were controlled by brigade headquarters. Later these companies were formed into battalions, under Divisional control, in order to create even larger volumes of deadly fire. These "barrages" (at times of a million rounds from 100 or more guns over several hours) delivered indirect and direct machine gun fire. This fire was integrated with artillery and mortars, in so-called "fire-plans", to produce devastating firepower that neutralised or destroyed German defences and troop concentrations in both the attack or defence.

The AIF eventually raised five machine gun battalions, the 1st to the 5th, one for each of its infantry divisions. They originally consisted of three companies of 16 Vickers guns each, found by transferring a machine gun company from each of the three infantry brigades in a division. A fourth company was added to each of these battalions in 1917. These units were often "brigaded" or grouped together to support Australian tactical operations, much in the way that the AIF and other British forces kept their artillery brigades in the front line to continuously support Corps and other Division operations. Each battalion had 64 Vickers guns at its disposal.

The NZEF raised the 1st and 2nd Machine Gun Companies in January 1916, and the 3rd in February of that year. In 1917, a 4th company was raised as part of the short-lived 4th New Zealand Brigade. Like the AIF machine gun companies, they were grouped into a battalion, in this case the new New Zealand Machine Gun Battalion in February 1918. The 4th New Zealand Machine Gun Company appears to be the only unit of the 4th New Zealand Brigade to remain in the New Zealand Division order of battle following the disestablishment of that brigade in 1918 and the subsequent transfer of the company.

The British army had formed its own Machine Gun Corps in October 1915, such was the importance the BEF placed in this weapon. The Machine Gun Corps cap badge contained crossed Vickers machine guns in its design. It is interesting to note that initially tanks were also part of the Machine Gun Corps, with these armoured vehicles formed into companies of the aptly named Heavy Section of the Machine Gun Corps. By mid-1917 they transferred out to form the Tank Corps.

By 1917, the almost limitless availability of ammunition, a lavish level of technical and armourer support, and the growing level of tactical proficiency in machine gun employment made the machine gun the dominant infantry weapon of the British Empire on the Western Front.

Geoff's Jottings

Geoff McMillan spends much of his time researching people and events of the First World War. Every now and then, in a book or on an internet website, he comes across snippets of interest - perhaps something new or something that he knew and had forgotten - and has started to keep notes of them. Geoff's Jottings will appear every now and then in the newsletter.

Have you heard of Victor Grayson? He was a former English MP who joined the NZEF while on a lecture tour of New Zealand. Invalided out of the army after being wounded at Passchendaele, he "disappeared" in strange circumstances in 1920 and was never officially seen again. A number of books have been written about him. The ones by Lord Clark of Windermere conjure up some fascinating possibilities ... blackmail, murder ... Well worth a read.

Lieutenant General Sir Carton de Wiart VC, KBE, CB, CBE, DSO was born of Belgian and Irish parents and had a military career that spanned the Boer War, First and Second World Wars. He was shot seven times, losing an eye and an arm. He tunnelled out of a POW camp and tore off some fingers which a doctor refused to amputate ... He looked most distinctive with an eye patch and empty sleeve. He rather modestly omitted mention of the VC in the first edition of his memoirs. He claimed to have "really enjoyed the First World War."

A chance remark

Tim Keenan

As readers may know, I am most fortunate to live in the south east corner of England some 25 kms for the busy port of Dover. With its many daily sailings to Calais and Dunkerque on the north coast of France, going over to the Ypres Salient and to the Somme Battlefields can easily done in a day with good planning.

Back in June 2017, my good pal Mark Farmer and I self-planned a trip to Europe, taking in old machinery museums in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. I had mentioned to Mark on the last couple of days of our trip we could visit an excellent vintage car museum near Ypres. He knew of my long time interest in the Great War and asked if I could show him around the Ypres area with its many war memorials to our brave lads! I said it would not be a problem and I duly booked a very nice modern and well equipped hotel just off the main square.

We arrived in the town in the late afternoon of 7 June, the date of the famous Battle of Messines and the capture of Wytschaete village one hundred years ago. We had a nice evening meal in one of the many restaurants next to the Cloth Hall, and had plenty of time to stroll up to the Menin Gate for the Last Post ceremony at 8.00 pm. I noted the new Commonwealth War Graves Commission information office which had recently opened a few doors down from the Gate on the left of the street, looking very smart.

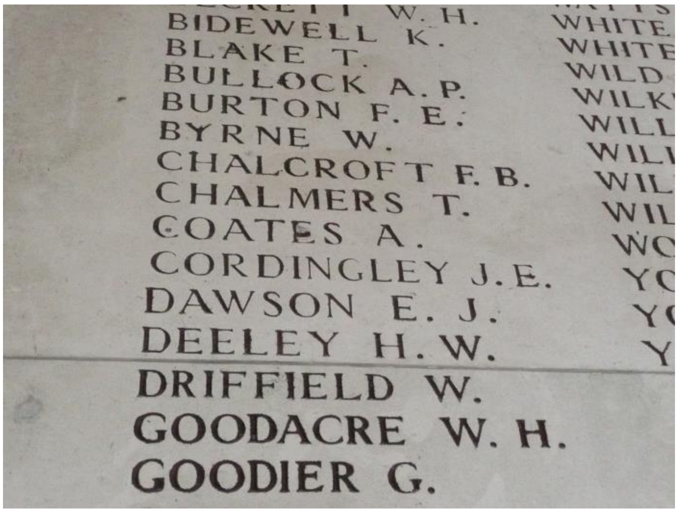
A contingent of the New Zealand military, which included, as one would expect of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Army and Air Force, all in their number one dress uniforms with appropriate decorations, gathered to attend this moving ceremony, with a number of Maori showing their proud ancestry. The service under the gate was carried out, with a school choir and a small group of school children playing various instruments, hymns were sung in Maori and

English, a lament was sung, and the service ended with the full version of the New Zealand national anthem by the many New Zealanders attending. We were proud to be a part of this Service of Remembrance.

It was at this point, I was explaining to Mark the significance of the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial to the Missing of the First World War. When he turned to me and said "you know I have a rellie who was killed in the First World War and I do not know too much about him", I suggested that we have a look in the Register lodged on the brass door box on the Gate? We duly scanned it and low and behold there he was - we were stunned.

The register showed Corporal James Edward Cordingley, Army service no 10420 was a member of the 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps. He was sadly killed on 10 November 1914, aged 21. He was the son of William Henry and Mary Ann Cordingley, of 54 Skinner Street, Chatham, Kent, very near to the famous Royal Navy Dockyard on the River Medway. It is known on 10 November 1914, Corporal Cordingley's unit entered the line at Klein Zillebeke, near Ypres, and he was in a machine gun section which had a number of Vickers machine guns. This area or region had seen some very heavy fighting over the previous month and the No Man's Land between the opposing armies was littered with shell holes and many unburied bodies.

It has always been a Farmer family legend that he was a brave man and showed it by standing by his machine gun to the last and he should have been awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 10 November. But it was awarded instead to Lieutenant John (known as Jack) H S Dimmer who was the commander of this machine gun section at that time - opposing his section was the Prussian Guard. He was wounded more than three times in this action. His Victoria Cross was announced in the London Gazette on 19 November 1914.



Corporal James Edward Cordingley's name on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial
Image: Tim Keenan

After he had recovered from his many wounds he visited the Cordingley family and gave them nine gold sovereigns to keep them going, as the Cordingley family had eleven children, nine boys and two girls - it would appear that Jack did not have sufficient funds to give the full total of coins to all the children when he visited. One of the small girls was Mark's grandmother, who spoke to Mark about James a number of times. James was Mark's great uncle.

As Jack Dimmer was one of the first recipients of the VC during the First World War, he was given much publicity at the time. By January 1915 he was promoted to Captain and his home town of Wimbledon, now part of greater south London, advised him they would wish to honour him with the Freedom of the Borough. He politely declined saying, 'Too much publicity has been given to my name already and it has caused me a great deal of worry and annoyance. To accept the Freedom would only bring further publicity and such is not in accordance with the conditions of the service."

It should be noted the Kings Royal Rifle Corps was one of the most prodigious and aristocratic regiments of the British Army, and was commanded by the sons of gentlemen. By 1908, Dimmer (now a 2nd Lieutenant) was serving in the 7th Battalion, and he was the first "ranker officer" in the regiment's history. He had enlisted in this battalion in July 1902 as a private, though he had been in a cadet force in the previous years. He married on 19 January 1918 and was killed on 18 March 1918. He was also awarded the MC in October 1914. Lieutenant Colonel Dimmer is buried on the Somme in Vadencourt British Cemetery, Maissemy, near St Quentin.

Finally, Mark Farmer is quite certain he is the first member of his family to see the name of his lost rellie's name engraved on this historic First World War Memorial to the Missing. It is quite likely the family never had the wherewithal to visit the Ypres battlefields and may not have known where he was commemorated.

* *

Soldiers of 3rd Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade, in muddy conditions at "Clapham Junction", Belgium, c20 November 1917. The photo shows one soldier reading jokes from the publication New Zealand at the Front *to a wounded man on a stretcher. This publication was written and illustrated in France by men of the New Zealand Division and this edition was published by Cassell and Co Limited, London, in 1917.*
Photographer: Henry Armytage Sanders
Image: Alexander Turnbull Library, Ref: 1/2-012979-G

Emailed newsletters: With the more frequent use of photos in the newsletter, if you would like to have your newsletter emailed to you so that you can see the photos in colour, please let me know. I am happy to either a) email the newsletter to you; or b) email *and* post it to you. Your choice – just let me know (elizabeth6@xtra.co.nz). If you want to stay with the status quo (remaining on the posting list only), then you don't need to do anything.

To join the New Zealand Branch of the Western Front Association, please contact Elizabeth Morey (address details below). The current subscription for membership is $15.00 per year per household (January to December). All new members are very welcome – you certainly don't have to be an "expert".

The views expressed in articles in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect or represent those of the editor or members of the New Zealand Branch of the Western Front Association.

All contributions to the next newsletter would be very welcome: The next newsletter is due for publication in February 2018. The deadline for articles, snippets of information, poetry, book reviews etc is the first week in January 2018. Please post to Elizabeth Morey, 89/1381 Dominion Road, Mt Roskill, Auckland 1041, or email to elizabeth6@xtra.co.nz.