

Leslie Gordon Mumford 1890-1916

Compiled by Maureen Lee in 2016-17

Birth

Leslie was born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1890, the youngest of the 10 children of a Tasmanian-born tailor, William John Mumford, and his New Zealand - born wife, Elizabeth Margaret (known as Margaret) Mumford (née Lewis). She was a midwife. She died when he was 14, his dad when he was 24.

Embarkation

He departed Wellington on 8 January 1916 on the *Maunganui* for Suez with the 9th Reinforcements Auckland Infantry Battalion, A Company – No. 12/3745. He was the only one of his family to go to the war.

According to his Military History Sheet, he was a labourer and a Presbyterian. He gave his sister Emily (Mrs J B Young) as his next of kin. He had brown hair and blue eyes.

At war

The information below is taken from the War Diary and Intelligence Summary of his commanding officer (National Archives, Wellington). The diary covers the 2nd Battalion, Auckland Infantry Regiment, and the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade.

His battalion (the term I will use) spent several weeks in Egypt (at or near Moascar), then boarded the *Ascania* at Alexandria for Marseilles, arriving on 16 April. They left by train the next day for Steenbecq, where they were billeted at Rebecq via Aire – ‘Strength 31 Officers 835 Other Ranks’. Then on to Bleu and Armentieres.

The New Zealand Army History website states: ‘On 13 May 1916 the New Zealand Division moved into front-line trenches for the first time, a six and a half kilometre long sector in the Armentières area.’

Leslie’s battalion was first sent into the trenches on 14 May: ‘Sent into trenches relieving 10th Lancashire Fusiliers. In trenches 8 days. Casualties 2 killed 7 wounded. Returned to billets at Armentieres night of 22/23 May.’

The War Diary reports that over these 3 months 24 of the regiment’s men were killed.

They had four breaks from the front line trenches: 23 May to 1 June; 7 June to 20 June; 8 July to 16 July; and 27 July to 8 August.

They left the trenches on 17 August. A series of marches and train rides brought them to Allery on 21 August.

On 2 September they marched 10 miles to Riencourt, and on 3 September they marched 5 miles to Picquigny, where they stayed for 4 days spending their time on company training, musketry, battalion training, and brigade training.

On 7 September they were off again. Two days of marching and they were near Albert and preparing for battle: ‘Training in bayonet fighting, organisation and extension of working parties and construction of strong points’.

On 10 September they marched to Mametz Wood.

At 12 noon on the 12th they marched to Fern Line. Over the next 2 days they 'sapped forward' and straightened the line by constructing a new trench, and they improved the existing trenches.

The New Zealand Army History website again: 'At 0620 hours 15 September 1916 the New Zealand Division took part in its first major action near Flers, as part of the Somme offensive. In 23 days of constant fighting 1560 New Zealanders were killed and 5440 were wounded.'

The statistics for Leslie's battalion for that day are 6 officers and 52 Other Ranks killed, 7 officers and 228 Other Ranks wounded and 13 Other Ranks missing.

The next day they were relieved by the 2nd Battalion of the Canterbury Regiment at 9 a.m. They marched to Check Line in the Reserve Area, and later in the day moved to Thistle Dump.

On the 17th they rested. 'Heavy rain all day.'

Men of the 2nd Auckland Battalion in Switch Trench during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, 15-22 September 1916. This battle was part of the third major push of the Somme offensive.



Death



**PTE. LESLIE MUMFORD,
of Auckland,
Died of wounds.**

Leslie was reported missing on 15 September and died of wounds on 17 September 1916 at a Clearing Station (according to a Memorial Notice). His legs were blown off and It took him 2 days to die, my father said. It seems he was one of the 228 Other Ranks wounded on the 15th. He may have been wounded by 'our own barrage' (see Appendix 1 of the War Diary and Intelligence Summary below).

An inscription added to his mother's tombstone in Takapuna, Auckland, states he was 26 when he died in France on 17 September 1916.



His grave. I would like to know who took this photo and when. It was in my grandmother's possession.



His grave at Heilly Station Cemetery, which is about 2 kilometres south-west of Mericourt-l'Abbe. It was the site of a clearing station. I assume it is the same grave.

There are two soldiers commemorated on his headstone. The other is 12193 Private James Bryson, who died of wounds on 16 September. He was from the 10th Battalion Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). He is named on a memorial to the men of G & J Weir, Cathcart, Glasgow, who were killed in WWI. (G & J Weir was a foundry that manufactured pumps, boilers etc. for ships.)

The Commonwealth Graves Commission website (<http://www.cwgc.org/>) states:

The burials in this cemetery were carried out under extreme pressure and many of the graves are either too close together to be marked individually, or they contain multiple burials.

His Military History Sheet gave his legatee as a Miss A. Miller of 49 Anglesea street, Ponsonby. She published a Memorial Notice in the *Auckland Star* a year after he died:

MUMFORD—In fond and loving memory of Private Leslie Gordon Mumford (9th Reinforcements), who died of wounds, September 17, 1916: buried at Heilly Station Cemetery, France.

To memory ever dear.

Inserted by his loving friend Annie.

Her name on the Military History Sheet has been crossed out and replaced with 'married now Mrs Annie L. Keane, 11A Jervois Road'. I think this was done when his medals were distributed in November 1923.

Appendix 1 of the War Diary and Intelligence Summary:

Report by Lt Col CHJ Brown DSO commanding 2nd Battalion Auckland Regiment on the operations of 15th September 1916.

In accordance with Brigade Orders this Battalion advanced to the attack at 6.20 am on the 15th September 1916.

Objective: that portion of SWITCH Line from junction with FISH Alley to point about S 5 d 3.9.

Formation for Attack: Line of Coys in Coy column in the following order from right to left - 3rd, 15th, 6th and 16th Coys.

The advance was made in four waves the first wave moving over the parapet at 6.20 am. exactly, each succeeding wave following at 50 yards distance.

The troops went forward without a hitch, the direction, pace and general alignment being excellent. The CREST trench was found to be lightly held and the enemy met with there were dealt with by the first wave without delaying the advance.

When about 150 yards from the objective the leading wave began to suffer a few casualties from short bursts by our own barrage; and immediately before entering the SWITCH trench when the 1st and 2nd waves had merged the barrage had been overstepped and the casualties were considerable.

The line was found to be strongly held and with numerous Machine Guns but the speed with which the attack was delivered prevented the enemy from bringing the latter into action and he had to rely on the bomb and rifle.

Once at close quarters the bayonet was freely used and by 6.50 am the trench was comfortably in our hands.

By 7.5 am the leading lines of the 3rd Brigade commenced to pass through our positions.

As soon as the position was captured work of consolidating the line was put in hand by digging a new line about 50 yards forward and constructing a strong point on right flank. The object of constructing a new line well forward was because it was considered that the enemy would use the old line as a ranging mark. This assumption proved correct as the position was subjected to a very heavy bombardment later in the day and during the night. The tanks detailed to operate on our front were unable to travel over the broken ground and did not come into action.

Four (4) Machine Guns undamaged were taken, two (2) others were found but being badly damaged were not salvaged.

Our total casualties on the 15th were 13 Officers and 296 Other Ranks.

The captured position was bombarded intermittently during the night of the 15th/16th but without damage to our troops.

Remarks

Though we suffered from our own barrage I am of the opinion that we erred on the right side, as had the large number of Machine Guns in the enemy's possession been brought into action it is conceivable that the attack may have been delayed or even held up. The way in which the attack was carried out proved that the previous training of all ranks had been on sound lines; both collectively and individually their work left nothing to be desired.

No prisoners (except wounded) were taken by this Battalion as at this stage it was impossible to do so without delaying the operation.

CHJ Brown Lieut Col Commanding