

**REGIMENTAL NUMBER 8/2458**  
**SERGEANT ARTHUR SCOTT OLIVER**  
**4<sup>TH</sup> COMPANY (D), NEW ZEALAND MACHINE GUN CORPS**  
**KILLED IN ACTION 24<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 1917**

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## **Introduction**

These notes outline Arthur Scott Oliver's service (1915 to 1917) with the New Zealand Army during World War One (1914 to 1918).

Essential details were obtained from Arthur's Military Personnel File and the official histories of the Otago Infantry Regiment and New Zealand Machine Gun Corp. A cross-referencing these and others sources produced an outline of those events and actions in which Arthur participated.

Every effort has been made to place Arthur's service within an historic context, and to inject information describing environments in which events took place and great sacrifices made almost one hundred years ago. This has been assisted by the publication of new works on the First World War that provide a clearer focus on Australian and New Zealand participation in the major conflict.

With the exception of some short letters, a few photocopies of photographs, a Certificate of Service and one original medal, there are no surviving documents or oral histories of Arthur's experiences. Both parents died before World War One, and his surviving brothers and sisters had passed away by the early 1970s. Therefore, apart from some memorabilia little personal history was passed to subsequent generations.

Annex A contains copies of supporting items, and Annex B mentions sources used.

## **Arthur's family origins and early life**

Arthur Scott Oliver was born in Dunedin on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1893, the seventh child of James and Susan Oliver (née Purches): see photograph in Annex A.

Arthur's father was born in Jedburgh, Roxburghshire, Scotland, in 1843, and his mother was born (1857) in Kent, England. In 1873, James arrived in Wellington and Susan in 1877. They married in Lower Hutt (1878), and subsequently moved to Dunedin where James Oliver was a baker with Stephen William Wood and George Purches (James's brother-in-law).

The Oliver family was Norman French in origin. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century they arrived in the Border region of Scotland as part of the Clan Fraser: they were a sept or family within the Clan Fraser. Further back, the family origins could be traced to Celtic people living in southern France and northern Italy, and they could originally have been of Germanic origin (as part of the early Celtic grouping from southern Germany). European telephone books show that the majority of persons with the Oliver surname live in the southern French region of Provence (between Arles and Nice) and the northern Italian regions of Piedmont and Lombardy.

Between the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and the late 1800s, Oliver family (or tribe) lived in the Forest of Dean on the outskirts of Jedburgh. The family protected themselves from passing Scottish and English armies and clashes among border factions. The family was also involved in cattle rustling and mercenary activities. From 1845 onwards, the Olivers were part of the migration of Scottish peoples to Canada, the United States, Australia or New Zealand. There are no known direct Oliver descendants of our family living in and around Jedburgh, although there are presently folk with the Oliver surname living in the area (2003 observations).

The Purches family could trace its origins to a Norman noble called 'Perahgoz' meaning 'bear-Goth'. Following the Battle of Hastings, their liege lord Duke William of Normandy granted the Purches family lands in Kent for distinguished assistance to the Norman overlords during the invasion of England (1066). The family names can be spelt as Purchase, Purchas, Purchass, Purchas, Purches, Purkiss, Purkess, Purkis, Purkeys, Purkys and Pourkes. Distant relatives still reside in Kent (last contacted in 2002).

There were nine children in James and Susan's family. Arthur was the youngest of seven sons (John, James, George, William, Alfred, Percival and Arthur) and two daughters Lillian (Lil, Lily or Lilly) – two years older than Arthur – and Margaret (Maggie) - the youngest child. The family lived in Dunedin's North-East Valley: rented accommodation in York Place, Frederick and Albany Streets (close to the modern CBD). Arthur's schooling was in Dunedin (probably the former Union Street School at the intersection of Great King and Union Streets) and Wellington between 1899 and 1906 (possibly finished at age 12 years).

Around 1900, the family returned to Wellington in search of better prospects. They lived at two Thorndon addresses. Both parents died early – James Oliver (1906) of heart problems, and Susan Oliver (1911) of pernicious anaemia. They are buried in the Karori Cemetery (plot 68, H-MP2) at the eastern boundary close to Ian Galloway Park, Wellington (grid reference Latitude 41° 275226, Longitude 174° 753041). The grave has no headstone: in the mid-1980s, cemetery managers planted a gum tree to mark and cover the plot.

Prior to enlistment, Arthur was an apprentice plumber, and his attestation form listed his occupation as 'plumber'. It is not known when and to whom he was apprenticed.

### **Enlistment in the New Zealand Army**

Arthur's Military Personnel File (see Annex A) provided a valuable outline of his details and subsequent service. A photocopied version does not contain conduct, training and course details or medical records, although other pages mention sickness and injuries.

At the age of 22 years, Arthur Oliver enlisted as a private in the Otago Infantry Regiment. According to Personnel Branch, Headquarters, New Zealand Defence Force, Wellington, it is more likely he enlisted in the Regiment's 4<sup>th</sup> Otago Battalion. The unit drew personnel from the Dunedin City area.

The Regiment consisted of two battalions that drew personnel from North, South and Central Otago and Southland. Within the 2011 force structure of the New Zealand Army, the battalion is a Territorial Force unit - the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Otago and Southland) of the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment. In an operational state, an infantry battalion would have four rifle companies, a weapons support company and a logistic company: each company would have up to 120 personnel. As mentioned later, Arthur transferred from the infantry to the New Zealand Machine Gun Corps.

Arthur was attested at Trentham Military Camp (Hutt Valley) on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1915: the attesting officer was Captain A Digby-Smith. Arthur was a volunteer. Once attested, names of attested personnel were published in the *'Evening Post'* of 19<sup>th</sup> March 1915, Issue 66, page 2: see Annex A.

There is no information as to whether his six brothers volunteered for service or were conscripted (after 1915): his older brother Percy was unable to pass the medical examination due to a pre-existing leg injury.

On enlistment, Arthur's medical details show that he was 5 foot 8 inches tall (1.73 metres), very slightly built at 130 pounds (59 kgs) and his teeth were in a fair condition. The medical officer was Captain H S Hughes-Steele.

Arthur's next-of-kin was his eldest brother, John Oliver, who was a chef at the Burlington Café, Wellington (location unknown). John subsequently moved to the New England region, New South Wales, Australia. His daughter, the late Mrs Olwyn Smyrk (né Oliver) provided copies of Arthur's photographs and correspondence to his New Zealand nephew Arthur Oliver (then living in Nelson). Mrs Smyrk's son John Smyrk later provided photographic copies of the above: see Annex A. Both John and his sister – Margaret Priest - live in Newcastle.

Arthur's Wellington address on enlistment was given as the Zealandia Private Hotel. The hotel was possibly located opposite the former Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company Station, Te Aro, Wellington. The station occupied the block bounded by Tory, Wakefield and Cable Streets. The former Manthel Motors building covers half the site, and apartments are being constructed on the other half (mid-2012): see Annex A.

There are no enlistment photographs of Arthur. According to the Personnel Branch, Headquarters, New Zealand Defence Force, photographs were taken on enlistment and attached to personnel records. In the 1980s, a decision was made to transfer all personnel records of those who had served with South Island-based units to a central national deposit at the Trentham Military Camp, Upper Hutt. For some unexplained reason, personnel at the then Southern Command, Christchurch, removed all photographs before records were shipped to Trentham for consolidation with other NZDF personnel records.

In 2006/2007, personnel records of all Boer War and World War One personnel were transferred from Trentham to the National Archives, Wellington. Further details are at <http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz>.

### **Initial training**

There are no details of Arthur's pre-deployment training. We could assume that he was trained at the Featherston Training Camp (demolished after the Second World War), Wairarapa, with pre-embarkation activities and assembly at Trentham Military Camp (Upper Hutt). According to his regimental records, less than one month was allocated for training and pre-embarkation activities.

In 2012, newly enlisted New Zealand Army infantry personnel are required to undertake a 16 weeks of all arms training course (at ATG Waiouru, central North Island) followed by dedicated infantry training with the School of Infantry (ATG Waiouru) and Regular Force units (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> Battalions). They would need to achieve a competency level of 4 (requiring up to two years of full-time service) before being considered for an overseas deployment to a Peace Support operation (Chapter 7, United Nations Charter) where combative situations could arise. For instance, NATO and United States-led operations in Afghanistan require formed units capable of conducting high-intensity attritional combative missions.

Arthur and his companions would have encountered high-intensity combative situations each time an attack was launched (or assault repelled) requiring attritional warfare between two opposing sides. Casualty lists of actions at Gallipoli and the Western Front speak for themselves.

### **New Zealand Army (1914 to 1918)**

Annex A contains the New Zealand Army's formation between 1914 and 1918.

## **Embarkation - Egypt and beyond**

Details of all Reinforcements are listed in the Nominal Rolls of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (World War One), Volume I. The Rolls were published at the end of hostilities (1919): see Annex A. Arthur's name is listed on page 551 of the Nominal Rolls.

By June 1915, New Zealand had personnel serving in German (Western) Samoa, Egypt, the Egypt/Sinai and Gallipoli (as from 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915). Arthur embarked from Wellington on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1915 as part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements bound for Egypt. The New Zealand Army maintained a regional base in the centre of the Suez Canal Zone alongside British and Australian forces: see map in Annex A.

The Nominal Rolls listed three ships for the 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement embarkation, HMNZT 24 – *'Maunganui'*, HMNZT 25 – *'Tahiti'*, and HMNZT – *'Sparima'*. It has not been possible to identify which ship Arthur sailed on: see Annex A.

## **Passing through Egypt**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements arrived in Port Suez (southern end), Egypt, between 24<sup>th</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> August 1915.

There are no details of Arthur's service period in Egypt, except that New Zealand forces stationed there were required to repulse Turkish military attacks out of the Sinai and Saudi Arabia designed to frustrate allied activities in and around the Suez Canal. Arthur's Personnel File shows that he joined up with the Otago Infantry Regiment on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1915. Presumably, this could have been at the Suez Canal transit point, on the Greek island of Lemnos Island – Nisos Limnos - (Latitude 39\*, Longitude 25\*) located in the Aegean Sea at the southern approaches to the Dardanelles, or even at ANZAC Cove.

## **Dardanelles Peninsula – Gallipoli campaign**

The Gallipoli Campaign was launched on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915 with the landing of ANZAC troops on the beach at Ari Burnu, on the Turkish Dardanelles Peninsula, and British and French troops at neighbouring locations. The allies used Lemnos Island as a marshalling point for troops on the Dardanelles Peninsula. Ari Burnu ('ANZAC Cove') was gradually enlarged northwards to Suvla Bay. After eight months of intensive fighting and considerable loss of life, the ANZACs were evacuated to Egypt. The main body of the New Zealand forces were evacuated by 15<sup>th</sup> December 1915. See Commonwealth War Graves Commission document on the Gallipoli Campaign, 1915.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1915, Arthur disembarked at Gallipoli as a member of the 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, and joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Company of the Otago Infantry Regiment that had been part of the original landing force (25<sup>th</sup> April 1915). There is no information on the ship/s that transported Arthur from Egypt to Gallipoli.



The 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement arrival coincided with allied attacks on:

- Chunuk Bair (7/8<sup>th</sup> August 1915) – located inland between ANZAC Cove and Suvla Bay – undertaken mainly by the Wellington and West Coast Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Malone. The Official History of the Otago Regiment (pages 67, et al) shows that between 21<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> August 1915, the allies attempted to link the ANZAC Cove and Suvla Bay sectors. After many attacks, the Australian, British and New Zealand forces captured the intervening Hill 60. The Otago Infantry Regiment was located on the northern end of the ANZAC operations close to Suvla Bay where Turkish defensive defences were located.
- Battle of Suvla Bay (6<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> August 1915) where the British IX Army Corp (32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Brigades) landed (6/7<sup>th</sup> August 1915) unopposed. The force deferred attacking Suvla Heights, in spite of reports that Turkish reinforcements would soon arrive. As a result, the British commander was sacked (15<sup>th</sup> August 1915).

The Otago Regiment sustained heavy losses during engagements north of ANZAC Cove between 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> August 1915; in fact the unit was almost decimated. The 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements provided 300 much needed personnel. The Official History of the Otago Infantry Regiment shows (page 66 and 67) that ... *'Without any preliminaries this new force was thrown into the violent struggle then ragging' ... 'recorded strength of 360 personnel (all ranks) on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1915; this number including the additional strength derived from the 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements'*.

At the point when Arthur joined in unit (29<sup>th</sup> August) ... *'the Battalion had returned to the Apex – on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1915 to the Rhododendron Spur downhill on the same ridge where Chunuk Bair – 'relieving the Canterbury Battalion in the holding of the southern ridge'.*

The Otago history (page 67) concluded that:

*'The losses sustained during the August operations had heavily drained the available forces; and with the close of the offensive another phase of wastage presented itself. Weariness of mind and body, the persistently bad and cramped conditions of existence, the lack of nourishing food, and the sapping vitality until it had reached breaking point commenced to levy an alarming toll of sick and diseased men. The evacuations became increasingly heavy. The August offensive had represented the last gallant expenditure of effort and wasted bodies simply could not carry on the struggle'.*

A Commonwealth War Graves Commission pamphlet summarised activities between August and December 1915 as:

... 'August saw further desperate actions as the New Zealanders, Australian, British and Indian forces attempted to take Chunuk Bair but were eventually forced back. The final significant actions took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> August at Hill 60 and Scimitar Hill as the forces at ANZAC Cove and Suvla Bay attempted to join and take the heights but were driven back with no gains.'

By 15<sup>th</sup> October 1915, an allied decision had been made to evacuate Gallipoli. In early November 1915 the weather deteriorated, and on 27<sup>th</sup> November a furious blizzard enveloped the peninsula. It lasted for three days and flooded the trenches of both sides. Hundreds of men drowned or died of exposure, and the ANZAC force was stricken with dysentery.

This finally convinced the allied politicians and commanders that Gallipoli was untenable during the winter. Between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December 1915, the ANZACs withdrew from ANZAC Cove and Suvla Bay and sailed for Egypt. By 9<sup>th</sup> January 1916, the Gallipoli campaign finally ended: see Annex B, especially 'Gallipoli: The Battlefield Guide', Mat McLachlan.

ANZAC forces suffered the loss of 33,600 personnel (one-third were killed) at the point of withdrawal: of the 8,556 New Zealand troops who served on Gallipoli, 2,721 were killed in action or died, and 4,752 were wounded (7,473 casualties). This accounted for 87 percent of the total New Zealanders who served at Gallipoli.

Arthur's Personnel File does not indicate if he had specific duties during his time at Gallipoli. One would anticipate that as an infantryman, he participated in ANZAC operations on the ridge below Chunuk Bair: see Otago Regimental history. Records show that he was injured or wounded and required Field Hospital treatment (25/26<sup>th</sup> August 1915). On 27<sup>th</sup> December 1915, he disembarked at Alexandra. The family has no personal records of Arthur's time in Egypt or the Gallipoli Campaign, except for a letter of 6<sup>th</sup> November 1916 Arthur wrote to his two sisters – Lillian and Margaret – from Sarpi (or Sarpy) Camp, Moudros Bay, Lemnos ...

*'Dear Lil and Maggie,*

*I received your very welcome letter dated Sept 14<sup>th</sup>. Glad to hear you are all in good health. I have been keeping the very best of health as usual. Very pleased you received the parcels from Egypt. I sent one to Doris but it came back to me here so I had to re-post it. Well girls I will have to close for the want of space. Wishing you all at home a Merry Xmas and a prosperous New Year.*

*Best Love*

*Arthur XXXXX'*

We do not know who Doris was: could it have been Arthur's girlfriend?

## Egypt - rest and reformation

The Otago history reported that ...

*'With the Gallipoli Campaign so unexpectedly closed, the Regiment, after resting and recuperating at Mudros, embarked on the old German ship the 'Derfflinger' on December 24<sup>th</sup> and sailed for Alexandria. On arrival the journey (south) was continued by rail to Moascar Camp, Ismailia'.*

*And ... 'On January 25<sup>th</sup> 1916, 250 rifles and two machine guns of the Regiment, under Major D. Colquhoun, were ordered to proceed to Bench Mark and Ridge Posts, on the east bank of the Suez Canal where the duties were of the lightest order and every facility was afforded for healthful bathing in the waters of the Canal. Two days later the 7th Reinforcements arrived from New Zealand, and the Regiment received an additional strength of six officers and 230 other ranks. Reorganisation of companies followed this absorption of strength, and on January 10<sup>th</sup> a programme of training was commenced. On the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1916, the New Zealand and Australian Division was inspected by General Sir A. J. Murray, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Egypt. On the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1916, the Otago detachment in occupation of the two posts on the east bank of the Canal was relieved and returned to Moascar.'*

On 27<sup>th</sup> December 1915, Arthur arrived at Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. He was transferred to a machine gun section on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1916, and on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1916 he was posted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Machine Gun Company, New Zealand Machine Gun Corp, of the newly formed 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade. This meant that Arthur transferred out of the Otago Infantry Regiment and into a new corp.

Six battalions were assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Wellington Regiment
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Wellington Regiment
- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Canterbury Regiment                      later assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade
- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Auckland Regiment
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Auckland Regiment
- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Otago Regiment                              later assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade
- 1<sup>st</sup> Machine Gun Company, New Zealand Machine Gun Corp
- 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Trench Mortar Battery formed in France, April 1916.

Two further brigades were formed: the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade – from reinforcements arriving from New Zealand personnel, plus some Gallipoli campaign veterans, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> New Zealand Infantry (Rifles) Brigade that arrived complete from New Zealand. Together, the three brigades formed the New Zealand Division.

On its formation, the New Zealand Division numbered around 15,000 personnel and was commanded by Major-General Sir Andrew Russell a RMA Sandhurst graduate and Hawke's Bay pastoralist. The brigades were commanded by British regular force officers: Brigadier-General Earl Johnston commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade until he was killed in action by a sniper bullet (August 1917).

The 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade was located at Moascar Camp, outside the city of Al Ismailiyah, close to the Bitter Lake in the middle section of the Suez Canal. Moascar (30° 34' 60N and 32° 13' 60E) was one of a number of British naval and military establishments along the Canal: at that time Egypt was a British Protectorate: see Annex A.

In preparation for the deployment of New Zealand forces to the Western Front (France and Belgium), machine gun sections were formed within each battalion, and personnel from the fourth company of each battalion. These sections were equipped with the British-made Lewis light machine gun. The objective was to provide each infantry brigade with a fire support capability: see Annex A.

In early 1916, while still in Egypt, the Official History of the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade noted that:

*'Coincident with the organization of the Division, the Machine Gun Sections were withdrawn from their battalions and combined into Machine Gun Companies, one of which was attached to each Brigade that formed Rifle Brigade sections was known as No. 3 Company, and came into being officially on March 1<sup>st</sup>. As the establishment of a Machine Gun Company was headquarters and four sections of four guns each the organization was a simple matter, for the sections were ready-made, and it was only necessary to draft in the personnel for the Company Headquarters and the extra officer now required for each section. The following were the officers as finally arranged:*

- *Officer Commanding: Captain J. Luxford (3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion).*
- *No. 1 Section: Lieutenant R. G. Gallien (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion), Lieutenant L. S. Cimino (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion).*
- *No. 2 Section: Lieutenant A. C. Finlayson (Otago Mounted Rifles), 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant K. D. Ambrose (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion).'*
- *No. 3 Section: Lieutenant C. G. Hayter (Canterbury Mounted Rifles), 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant P. D. Russell (Otago Mounted Rifles).*
- *No. 4 Section: Lieutenant C. S. Geddis (Otago Mounted Rifles), Lieutenant J. A. D. Hopkirk (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion).'*

*'The Company served with the Brigade until January, 1918, when all the machine-gun sections of the Division were organized into the New Zealand Machine Gun Battalion of four Companies (Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury, Otago), and so passed from the control of Brigade commanders.'*

In addition, the history noted that:

*'To take the place of the Machine Gun Sections, preparations were made for the establishment of Lewis Gun Sections in each battalion, and (the following) officers were appointed as specialists to supervise the training of the personnel and to superintend the general work' ... 'Lewis guns, however, were a new and practically untried arm, and were not available for issue at a greater rate than two per battalion, though the regulation scale of four per unit, as laid down by the Army Council at the beginning of the year, was made up before we entered the trenches on the Flanders front. As the usefulness of the guns, both in attack and in defence, became more and more clearly demonstrated, the rate of issue steadily increased until it stood, towards the close of the war, at 36 per battalion, 32 for ordinary use and four for anti-aircraft purposes.'*

Arthur's Personnel File shows that he was attached to a 'Machine Gun Section' on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1916, and later the 'Machine Gun Company' on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1916. The Company was equipped with the Lewis machine gun. (The New Zealand machine gunners were equipped later with the larger British-made Vickers machine gun, and tasked to provide the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade with heavy machine gun support: see Annex A.) There were three Companies; we do not know which one Arthur was posted to.

Between January and April 1916, the Brigade was reinforced and trained, while at the same time providing defensive support to allied units defending the Suez Canal Zone from raids by Sinai Desert-based Turkish forces.

The New Zealand Mounted Rifles fought in a dismounted role during the Gallipoli campaign. With the exception of one squadron (Western Front) the majority of the Mounted Rifles personnel would remain in the Middle East for the duration of World War One conducting mounted operations against Turkish (and German) forces. The force also had a machine gun sub-unit created in Egypt (early 1916): see Lieutenant Colonel Terry Kinloch's excellent book *'Devils on Horses'*, 2008, in Annex B.

In late March 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade moved to Alexandria en route to France. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade would become part of the New Zealand Division on the Western Front. The New Zealand Machine Gun Corp would provide the New Zealand Division with a heavier fire support capability, along with mortars and artillery.

The family has no personal moments of Arthur's second time in Egypt.

### **Passage to France**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1916 the Official History of the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade noted reported that:

... 'the M.G. company departed from Alexandria, Egypt on the "Alaunia," a fine transport which, unfortunately, was torpedoed on her return journey from Marseilles, France, a fate which also subsequently befell both the "Franconia" and the "Arcadian" (these transported other Brigade components to France).'

'The departure from Alexandria commenced on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Little space was available on the ships for training exercises, but much time was devoted to lectures on trench warfare and preventive measures against gas attacks. In addition to the usual precautions taken against attack from submarines, all ranks wore lifebelts constantly both by day and by night, and each ship supplemented quick-firer, Lewis gun and Vickers gun sentries with sections of men with loaded rifles specially posted on either side.'

'No untoward event occurred, however, though there appeared to be frequent scares, and the course taken sometimes seemed to be a very roundabout one. Off the coast of Sardinia, for instance, the "Alaunia" was compelled to "about ship" for half a day and then zigzag to her destination. Except in the Gulf of Lion, the weather was fine and the sea smooth, and the transports arrived at Marseilles all well on the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> (April).'

## **Arrival in France**

In the 'On my way to the Somme', an excellent book containing personal reflections of men who served on the Western Front, Andrew Macdonald describes the New Zealanders arrival in Marseilles (south coast of France) ...

*'After being shipped piecemeal to Marseilles the Division was taken on a tiring 58 hour rail journey. Barely six months after its formation the Division was in the trenches of Armentières as part of General Sir Alexander Godley's II ANZAC Corp which in turn was part of the British II Army.'*

*'At the time, the New Zealand Division also began what became a three-year and constantly evolving training regime. Officers, non-commissioned officers and specialists were sent to schools of instruction to learn every ramification of scientific warfare. Infantry ... machine gunners were up-skilled in their respective trades.'*

In order to 'toughen up the troops' the New Zealand Division marched in a north-easterly direction from the English Channel coast to the mouth of the Somme River (near Abbeville) and on to city of Armentières in the Ypres Salient and close to the Belgium border: see map of the area in Annex A.

In France and Belgium, the New Zealand Division was involved in four main conflicts between May 1916 and November 1918 - Armentières and environs, the latter parts of the Somme and Ypres campaigns, and a series of

engagements in the Ypres salient through to the Armistice (November 1918). In terms of movements, the Division commenced its engagements in the Ypres Salient (in the north on the Franco-Belgium border), then south to the Somme Salient (north-west of Paris) and then back to the Ypres region.

### **France – Armentières encounters**

Macdonald noted that ...

*‘The Armentières salient was regarded as a ‘nursery’ sector in which the Division could familiarise itself with life on the Western Front ... The New Zealand Division would hold the Armentières salient until mid-August (1916), with its battalions revolving turns in the trenches’.*

On 13<sup>th</sup> May 1916, the New Zealand Division occupied trenches across a four-mile (eight km) stretch in the ‘quiet’ sector around the city of Armentières (north eastern France). Troops began acclimatising to the weather, life in the trenches and battle conditions. The Otago Regiment, which probably included Arthur’s machine gun company, conducted raids into German lines. During May and June 1916, 375 New Zealanders were killed in action, and 2,200 wounded. Most are buried in the Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery.

Arthur wrote to his sister Margaret from France (near Armentières) on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1916 ...

*‘Dear Maggie,*

*Just a card to let you know I am still doing well. I received a letter from Lilly(?) yesterday and was so pleased to hear you and all keeping so well I got quiet a surprise to hear that little Olwyn was walking. I am enclosing a handkerchief as a small souvenir from France. The little shop where I bought it is not far from the trenches and within the range of the shells. Hoping this finds you all in good health.*

*With best wishes to you all XXXXX Arthur’*

The child is probably Olwyn Margaret Smyrk (née Oliver) daughter of Arthur’s eldest brother, John Stephen Oliver. Olwyn was born in Wellington 27<sup>th</sup> December 1914, and died in September 2007 in Newcastle, Australia, aged 94. Arthur mentions the closeness of the frontline to Armentières and its environs.

### **France - Somme Salient - Battles of Fiers-Courcelette, Morval and Le Translay**

In June and July 1916, German forces undertook sustained attacks on the allied front lines. The New Zealand Division was moved south to the Somme Salient where allied commanders mounted a major counter-offensive.

The Somme Campaign began around the French city of Albert on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 and lasted until 10<sup>th</sup> November 1916. On the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1916, the New Zealand Division departed for the Somme Salient (Flanders Fields) then to a concentration area around the city of Abbeville and by 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1916, the New Zealand Division was clustered around Albert with the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade at Yonville. The Division remained there for ten days. The military tank made its debut at this battle. See map of the Somme Salient in Annex A.

Macdonald noted that ...

*'On 2<sup>nd</sup> September the New Zealand Division left for the Abbeville area and marched head long into the Somme River valley. The 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade was billeted around the village of Airaines. On 3<sup>rd</sup> September the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade continued to Yzeux and stayed there six days undertaking inspections, preparations and training. Moved to Allonville on 7<sup>th</sup> September close to the front line at Corsy, then on to Albert. The 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade was billeted at Lavieville.'*

Between 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September, Arthur was in the field. On 27<sup>th</sup> August 1916, the New Zealand Divisional pioneers and engineers moved to the front, then the New Zealand Field Artillery in early September. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade moved to bivouacs close to the front. The way forward was crowded, muddy, battered and smashed from artillery fire: see *'On my way to the Somme'*: see Annex B.

The New Zealand Division stayed around the Fricourt area for two days in preparation for the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. The artillery bombardment commenced on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1916 and continued through to 15<sup>th</sup> September firing 828,000 shells before infantry attacks commenced. The battle finished on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigades were the first New Zealand units to enter action at the Somme. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade was held in reserve undertaking rear echelon support activities at Fricourt and Mametz Woods: see details of the Battle of Flers-Courcelette in Annex A.

Macdonald noted that ...

*'By midnight on 15<sup>th</sup> September the two attacking New Zealand were spent forces: 6,000 men went over of which 2,050 (34 percent) were killed in action, wounded or missing. With Scottish and Canadian help two original objectives were almost taken. Artillery bombardments were insufficient and tanks made little impact'. ... 'By early morning of 16<sup>th</sup> September, the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade was deployed to support the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades holding out against three Bavarian Divisions.'*

The New Zealand Rifle Brigade and infantry units went into action at dawn on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1916, but by the end of the day, 600 New Zealanders had



been killed. As a comparison, 845 New Zealanders were killed on one day at Passchendaele (October 1917).

There were further engagements at Morval (25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September 1916) and Le Translay (1<sup>st</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October 1916). During the second part of the Battle of the Somme (15<sup>th</sup> September to 10<sup>th</sup> November 1916), the New Zealand Division was in the front line for 23 days, during which 1,560 New Zealanders were killed in action, and 5,440 were wounded. The New Zealand Division left the Somme on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1916 and spent the winter on the River Lys.

On 16<sup>th</sup> September 1916, Arthur was admitted to a Field Hospital, France, with a sprained ankle. We assume the injury occurred during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette.

### **England – sick and convalescence**

On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1916, he was admitted to the Southern General Hospital, Birmingham, United Kingdom. His records show that he was 'sick' and he remained there until 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916. Other than an ankle sprain, there is no reference as to why he was sent to Birmingham. On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1916, Arthur moved to the New Zealand Convalescent Hospital, Codford. According to *'Nursing in New Zealand: History and Reminiscences'*, Chapter XXXIX on *'New Zealand Hospitals in England and France'*, the ...

*'Codford Hospital was the next taken over by the New Zealand authorities shortly after Brockenhurst (Kent). This hospital was No. 3 N.Z. General Hospital; it was on Salisbury Plains, not far from the training camps, where the New Zealand Depot of 2,500 men were stationed. As it was for these men, the badly wounded from France were not treated here.'*

See pictures of Codford camp in Annex A.

### **England - further training**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 9<sup>th</sup> May 1917, Arthur was attached No 6 Depot, HQ NZEF (United Kingdom) based at Harrowby near Gratham, Lincolnshire. The machine gun school was located at the southern end of Belton Park.

At the end of World War One, Belton Park (and an adjoining House) returned to the private owners. In 1984, ownership of Belton House passed to the National Trust and Belton Park is a major East Midlands golf course: see details Belton Park in Annex A.

In *'The War Effort of New Zealand'* – published as part of *'New Zealand in the First World War 1914 – 1918'*, Chapter XV on *'The New Zealand Camps in England'* recalled that:

*'Each New Zealand reinforcement included a certain number of machine gunners, who, in addition to the ordinary reinforcement course*

*received special training in this work before they left the Dominion. The specialisation was greater as the war went on. They ranked as "specialists" with the reinforcements, but in England no such distinction awaited them, for they went to the infantry camps with the rest. It was so in the case of all "specialists," signallers, machine-gunners, and others. In the infantry camps they received a thorough training in drill and musketry, bombing, gas precautions, wiring and trench work. Afterwards when "specialists" were called for, these men's applications usually received first consideration.'*

*'Machine gunners had the advantage - it was usually considered an advantage - of a considerably longer period of training in England, - and certainly they had in New Zealand - than the infantry. For their training in England they were sent to Grantham - a railway junction town of considerable size on the Great Northern Railway, 102 miles from London. This was the centre of the British machine-gun world. In 1918 over 50,000 men were camped around there undergoing training. It was not so in the very early days of the war, before the value of the machinegun was fully realised! There were three Imperial camps at Grantham-Harrowby (where the general officer commanding, and the schools were), Belton Park, and Chepstone, the latter some distance away. At each of these places the drafts were divided into battalions, and the New Zealanders, who were camped at Belton Park, comprised one battalion. There were sometimes as many as 550 of our officers and men there. By having the training in the vicinity of the British machine gun camps, facilities in respect to ranges and instructors were available.'*

*To Belton Park from Grantham was four miles. Buses, for a small fee and motor cars for a high one, carried you there. The Park was the private property of Earl Brownlow, and the grounds, which were magnificent in their tree-clad undulating sweeps, surrounded Belton House, an old, roomy, mediaeval mansion. High lands stretched away north and south; and through the calm air perpetually came the distant tock, tock, of the ceaseless machine-gun fire, so familiar-at the front. The New Zealanders in this beautiful spot with its historic associations, and with Nottingham, Leicester, and Lincoln not many miles away, had ample to interest them, and, indeed, were very fond of the place. The average time spent there was seventy days. There was more to be learned in machine gunnery than accuracy of fire, and the mechanical construction of the weapon.'*

*'When our men first went to Grantham, New Zealand had only three machine-gun companies in the field. Another went with the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade just prior to the Battle of Messines, and a fifth was sent to France in December, 1917. New Zealanders won the reputation at Grantham of learning quickly.'*

*'There was ample amusement for the men in camp in theatre entertainments, concerts, and pictures, while at Harrowby, two miles*

*away was the garrison theatre, and at Grantham other public attractions. In most forms of sport the New Zealanders held their own in the district. There was not great scope in the camp grounds for agriculture, but though cultivation was not carried out to the same extent as at other New Zealand training depots, as much use as possible was made of the ground available. The camp was closed very soon after the termination of the war.'*

The Grantham course lasted approximately six weeks due to the intense demand for gunners. Thus, Arthur would have really only had basic training in the complexities of machine-gun warfare. His experience he would have to gain at the front and from the guidance of comrades. During his training, Arthur would have become a team player - each Vickers machine gun was ideally manned by a crew of eight. Four men were involved in the actual firing and the other four responsible for sighting, preparation and the bringing up of ammunition. Crews in the field normally numbered six, simply because of the shortage of men: see Annex A for specific details on the Vickers machine gun and its manning.

Arthur would have learned his 'trade' quickly and in the thick of the fighting - it was worth noting that members of the New Zealand Machine Gun Corp – and those in the British, Australian and Canadian forces - were called the 'Suicide Squad'. Arthur's machine gun could also have been placed in a battery of (usually) four guns. The British Machine Gun Corp casualties were considerable: of the 170,500 who served in the Corp, 13,791 were killed, 48,258 were wounded or missing. New Zealand World War One casualties were 456 killed or subsequently died of injuries.

The official history of the machine gun corp noted that ...

*'The new machine gun company that was formed to serve the 4th Brigade joined up with the (New Zealand) Division to take part in the formidable machine gun scheme that had been planned to co-operate in the offensive.'*

*'The 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Machine Gun Company was formed in May, 1917, at Grantham. Captain. L. M. Inglis, M.C., a great student of the machine gun and its tactics, who, unfortunately for the Corps, had been kept for over twelve months with the 3rd (Rifle) Brigade, left France in April 1917, to form and command the new company. The officers chosen for the company were:*

- *Officer Commanding: Captain. L. M. Inglis, M.C.*
- *Second-in-Command (temp.): 2nd Lieutenant Hosking.*
- *Section Officers: 2nd Lieutenant. D. O. Williams, 2nd Lieutenant. R. B. Steel, 2nd Lieutenant. C. F. Forsdick, 2nd Lieutenant. B. P. Hopkins, 2nd Lieutenant. L. A. Hill, 2nd Lieutenant. J. Carswell.*
- *Transport Officer: 2nd Lieutenant. E. D. McRae.'*

*'Captain Inglis was extremely fortunate in having such a keen set of young officers - all of whom (with one exception) had been promoted to commissioned rank in the field. Most of the n.c.o.'s and leading gun numbers were old hands, who had been returned to the depot from hospital after convalescing from wounds or sickness. These "old hands" were of immense service in the rapid formation and training of the company, which enabled it in less than a month from its formation to be engaged in active operations in France.'*

Arthur specialised in that weapon when posted to the 4th Company of the New Zealand Machine Gun Corps formed at Grantham (grid reference Lat 52\* 908540, Long 0\* 655403), Lincolnshire, England, on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1917. Within a month of its formation, the Corp was on active service in France. The Corp was disbanded in February 1918, and reactivated during the Second World War (and again disbanded 1945).

Arthur's Personnel File shows that he was posted to that company. No 4 Company was a divisional unit attached to the headquarters of the New Zealand Division. The machine gun companies – where Arthur had served previously – remained within the three brigades until early 1918. In Annex A, there is a photograph of the 1<sup>st</sup> Company; it has not been possible to locate a photograph of the 4<sup>th</sup> Company.

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1917, Arthur was appointed Lance Corporal. The 4<sup>th</sup> Company, New Zealand Machine Gun Corp, embarked for France (28<sup>th</sup> May 1917) and on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1917, Arthur was promoted to Corporal (in the field), vice 6/1720 Corporal T P Smith who was evacuated wounded. John Smyrk provided his original corporal chevrons: see photograph of Arthur with three colleagues (about June/August 1917).

### **France and Belgium - Messines salient – Battle of Messines**

At the time of Arthur's return to France, the New Zealand Division was preparing for its next major engagement on the Western Front – the Battle of Messines – 7<sup>th</sup> June to 31<sup>st</sup> August 1917. The Division had moved northwards to Messines, just south of the Belgium town of Ypres. The Battle of Messines was a prelude to the Third Battle of Ypres: see below. The New Zealand Division tunnelling engineers had been engaged in the Battle of Vimy Ridge (9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> April 1917) in and around the French city of Arras: see map in Annex A.

The Battle of Messines commenced (7<sup>th</sup> June 1917) with the detonation of nineteen large mines under the German lines. The objective was the capture of the Messines (or Mesen) ridge. The New Zealand Division took all initial objectives in two days, but 700 personnel were killed in action and 3,000 wounded.

On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1917, the New Zealand Division pushed the German outposts back to the town of La Basseville, and between 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July 1917, the New Zealand Division crossed the River Lys to lose and then recapture La

Basseville. After capturing the neighbouring town Le Basseville, the New Zealand Division stayed in the line until 31<sup>st</sup> August 1917.

### **France and Belgium - Ypres Salient – Battles of Lille, Le Basseville and Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele)**

The Ypres offensive commenced on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1917 with an allied frontal attack on German lines around the French city of Lille and continued until October 1917. The subsequent assault on Passchendaele was part of a vast Allied offensive to keep the pressure on the Germans after the great struggles on the Somme in 1915: see map in Annex A and a Commonwealth War Graves publication on *'Battles and Memorials of the Ypres Salient'*.

The New Zealand Division re-entered the battle on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1917 as part of the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) when it attacked German lines at Gravestafel Spur (also called Broodseinde), Belgium, and succeeded in securing the objective. This was also referred to as the Third Battle for Passchendaele (26<sup>th</sup> October to 10<sup>th</sup> November 1917). After two days, the Division sustained 1,653 casualties (330 dead, 1,323 wounded). On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1917, the New Zealand Division suffered further devastating losses (845 killed in one day and 1,855 wounded) in a failed attack on a neighbouring Bellevue Spur. This was the worst day on the Western Front for the New Zealand Division. Bellevue Spur is only a few kilometres north of Polygon Wood.

According to Chapter IX of *'With the Machine Gunners in France and Palestine – The Official History of the New Zealand Machine Corps in the Great War - 1914 to 1918'* ...

*'On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1917 the New Zealand units went back into the field (at Passchendaele) to suffer the greatest number of New Zealand casualties: 2,700 in four hours. Struggling through the thick mud, with inadequate artillery cover and against uncut defensive wire, it broke the Division's spirit.'*

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 1917, the New Zealanders are relieved by Canadian troops, who captured ruins of Passchendaele village on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1917. Allied command closed down the Passchendaele offensive (20<sup>th</sup> November 1917) with objectives unachieved. The Germans recaptured Passchendaele on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1918: the allies recovered it again on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1918.

By the end of October 1917, more than 2,000 New Zealanders had been killed and 6,000 wounded as a result of actions in the Ypres salient: a total of 8,000 casualties and a casualty rate of 53 percent, compared with the eight month Gallipoli campaign total of 7,473 (2,700 died and 4,752 wounded). The majority of those killed are buried at the Tyne Cot Cemetery and those missing on Memorials at Tyne Cot and the New British Buttes Cemeteries.

At some point during these battles, Arthur was transferred to the New Zealand Wing II (Reserve Area) ANZAC Corp, Morbecque, located west of Armentières and northwest of Lille, and then on leave in England.

### **England – leave**

From 12<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October 1917, Arthur was on leave in England. We have no knowledge of where he spent his leave, although it is possible that he may have visited members of his late mother's family in Kent. It is not known if he visited Jedburgh, Scotland, to visit members of his late father's family.

### **Belgium - Ypres Salient – towards Menin and Mons**

The New Zealand Division's involvement in the Battle of Passchendaele came to an end on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1917 when it was relieved by Canadian troops. The waterlogged conditions, bleak winter weather and depressing memories of the Passchendaele fiasco made this a particularly trying experience.

During the winter months of 1917/18, the New Zealand Division spent a miserable time in the southern Ypres sector (south-west of Passchendaele). From late October 1917 onwards, the New Zealand Division was involved in protracted operations close to the French town of Boulogne, including a failed attack at Polderhoek in November 1917. *'Battlefield of 1914 to 1918'* noted that in ...

*'November 1917 the Kiwis took over the allied line from In der Ster Cabarent to the Reutelbeek. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canterbury and 1<sup>st</sup> Otago Regiments attachedd the Spur of the Polderhoek Chateau and although some ground was taken, the Chateau remained in German hands. The Divison remained in the sector until late February 1918'.*

During these operations, Arthur Oliver was killed in action.

### **Belgium - Killed in Action**

On 27<sup>th</sup> October 1917, Arthur returned from leave and rejoined his machine gun unit in the field around Polygon Wood. On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1917, Arthur was appointed Temporary Sergeant, vice 6/1915 Sergeant A H McHane, wounded in action, and full Sergeant on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 1917, Arthur was killed in action, which means he was promoted posthumously to the rank of Sergeant.

Between October and December 1917, there were a further 3,000 New Zealand casualties. Page 106 of the *'Official History of the New Zealand Machine Corps'* reported that during operations either side of the Menin Road (just south of Polygon Woods) in the period before 27<sup>th</sup> November 1917 ...

*'On 26th December the enemy attempted to recapture a square crater on the 2nd Brigade front, which the 1st Canterbury Battalion had occupied upon the Germans evacuating it a few days previously. The crater was an excavation for the erection of a large pill box. A heavy bombardment preceded the attack, which was launched at 4.15 p.m. Two guns of the 4th Company under Lieut. C. V. Marks, in position in the front line, a short distance from the right of the crater, opened on the assaulting Germans and were instrumental in crushing the attack.'*

*'During the operation Sergt. J. L. Collins was mortally wounded. Collins had been a tower of strength to the Company, and was regarded as one of its most efficient n.c.o.'s. Although Collins's wounds were so serious (his right eye had been knocked out amongst other things), he insisted upon reporting progress to his Company Commander at Headquarters on his way to the dressing station. He collapsed after making his report, and died two days later. Another valued NCO (Sergt A S Oliver) was killed by a shell'.*

The above Official History gave that date of death as around 26<sup>th</sup> December 1917, whereas all other sources state 24<sup>th</sup> November 1917. It has not been possible to identify the exact spot where Arthur lost his life, although the operations mentioned above were being conducted on a front to the east and south east of Polygon Woods: see hand written map in Annex A (this was reproduced in the Canterbury Regiment's Official History of World War One). The Menin Road (now N8) is now an east-west road. However, since 1919, another and much wider road (called A19) has been constructed between the Menin Road and Polygon Woods: it has a dual carriageway in either direction.

On the same day 25/1701 Sergeant J L Collings (not 'Collins') was seriously injured and died of wounds 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1918. He is buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery, on the northwestern French coast.

In a letter (see Annex A) to Arthur's brother John, 24/303 Sergeant Alan Hugh Thomas, 4<sup>th</sup> Company, New Zealand Machine Gun Corp, wrote from Belgium on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917...

*'Dear Mr Oliver,*

*I sincerely hope that these lines may offer a little consolation to you in your recent sad bereavement.*

*Your brother, Arthur, besides being a very dear friend and chum of mine, was a brother sergeant with me – we had become firm friends.*

*His loss is greatly felt by all who knew him, his happy manners and great good nature won for him the admiration and esteem of everyone, he was always a willing worker. You will appreciate it, if I tell you simply how he "went west".*

*His gun was in front line, our big guns were strafing and Fitz replied. Arthur saw to it that the crew were under cover while he with his No 1 stood to the gun in case of emergency.*

*Hardy had this been arranged than a “whiz bang” (German shell of small calibre) burst in the trench at their feet killing both instantaneously. When I arrived ten minutes later, Arthur was sitting against the side of the trench with a smirk on his face – he had died doing his duty and mercifully without any pain. This happened at ten minutes past five on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov just at dusk.*

*At night we laid him to rest in a shell hole, erecting a rude wooden cross to his sacred memory.*

*Killed in Action” marks the last resting place of one very dear to all. I feel the loss of these two chums more deeply than I can express and I miss their smiling faces terribly – hardly releasing that we shall never see them more.*

*I trust these lines may tend to lessen your grief and make you great loss a little easier to bear.*

*With deepest sympathy*

*I am*

*24/303 Sgt Alan H Thomas  
4<sup>th</sup> NZGC'*

Sergeant Thomas embarked from Wellington for Egypt on 15 October 1915: see Annex A. He was the son of Mr Hugh Thomas, Bealey Street, Christchurch. A search of casualties shows no mention of his name; it is assumed he survived World War One.

### **Buttes New British Cemetery - Polygon Wood**

As Sergeant Thomas noted, Arthur was buried in the field of battle: the *'History of the New Zealand Machine Gun Corp'* (in its annexes) recorded this as Mud Corner Cemetery, near Warneton, France, containing 85 Australian and New Zealand plots. Warneton is a small town north of Lille, and on the Franco/Belgium border. This would have been at the very southern end of the late 1917 New Zealand lines mentioned above.

It is assumed that Arthur was re-buried by a Graves Registration Unit (post-November 1918) at the Buttes New British Cemetery, Polygon Wood, near Zonnebeke, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. The grave is number XXIII B20, located to the immediate right of the main entrance (and close to the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing). This is much closer to where he was killed in action.



The other person to die alongside Arthur was 29655 Lance Corporal William John Russell, No 4, New Zealand Machine Gun Corps, son of James and Mary Jane Russell, 117 Osborne Street, Linwood, Christchurch. This is based on a search of the Commonwealth War Casualties database using the same date and location determinants. Lance Corporal Russell was born in Oamaru (possibly Eden Street), and he is buried in Grave XXIII B 6 Buttes New British Cemetery, Polygon Wood, three along from Arthur's plot. Lance Corporal Russell was in the Specialist Machine Gun Section of the 19<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements that embarked from Wellington on HMNZT 68 '*Maunganui*' or '*Tahiti*' for Plymouth, England: see Annex A.

The strategic objective was to secure ground and the axis of operations was northeast towards to the Belgium towns of Menin and Mons (in a north easterly direction). The New Zealand Division continued to operate in the area of the Menin Road, even though it lost ground during a sudden and final offensive by German forces on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918. As a result, Polygon Wood lay behind German lines for a while.

Polygon Wood is a wooded area, 1.6 kms southeast of Zonnebeke village: latitude 50° 847573 band longitude 3° 065186. The wood was cleared by allied forces in October 1914, given up to German forces on May 1915, re-taken by Australian forces in late September 1917, evacuated in the Battles of Lys and, finally retaken by the British 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1918.

In 1915, German forces formed a cemetery at the base of a Belgium army weapon butte. There are actually two cemeteries: a small Polygon Wood cemetery located in farmland containing about twenty plots, and across a small roadway and down a path, the larger Buttes Cemetery. The latter contains 103 Commonwealth burials in woodland laid waste during fighting, and developed further by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in the 1920s. At the far end of the cemetery is a memorial to those New Zealanders who fell in this area between September 1917 and May 1918, notably those with no known grave. At the other end, on top of the former buttes, is the Australian Divisional Memorial. The Commission manages the cemetery on behalf of Commonwealth nations. The cemetery is surrounded on all sides by woodland still too dangerous to enter due to unexploded ordnance.

Polygon Wood (Polygrama in Flemish) is close to the Belgium Highway No A 19 that connects the town of Menen (Menin in Flemish) with Leper (Ypers in Flemish). The village of Zonnebeke can be reached from the highway exit to Grote Molenstraat) a distance of 2 kms. In the centre of Zonnebeke, find 'Iperstraat – Iper Street – and head for the Passchendaele Museum. Close to the museum are small signs on dark green frames indicating the direction of three World War One features: the Australian Divisional Memorial, the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing and the Buttes New British Cemetery – all on one site – and the adjoining smaller Polygon Wood Cemetery that contains about 20 plots: see maps in Annex A.

Follow the Citernestraat, a narrow tar-sealed road for about 1.5 kms to a junction with the Lange Drewe road, turning right for about 200 meters. At a small car park (close to two farm houses) the smaller Polygon Wood cemetery - it is surrounded on three sides by farmland - is to the right and a pathway through the Wood on the left leads to the larger Buttes New British Cemetery. Due to unexploded ordnance and defensive obstacles, the Belgium authorities do not permit entry is to the tall pine woodlands with thick undergrowth of ferns: see Annex A.

Members of the Oliver family continue to visit Arthur Scott Oliver's grave at Polygon Wood: see photographs of Heather Marks (neè Oliver) and Julia Marks in October 2003 and they re-visited Polygon Woods in 2007 with Catherine Spackman (neè Oliver), and also those taken by Peter and Diane Oliver in October 2010: see Annex A.

The Passchendaele Museum is also worth a visit. It is located in a small park with a lake. The large three-storied wooden building was built following World War One. On one side is a plaque noting that it served as Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery's headquarters (late 1944). The museum contains articles of battles in the surrounding countryside and in the basement, a model of Western Front trenches: see details in Annex A.

### **Belgium and Germany – towards the Armistice**

During the last year of the war, the New Zealand Division participated in the Battles of Bapaume (21<sup>st</sup> August 1918), Havrincourt (September 1918) and Le Cateau and Selle River (both October 1918) and Le Quesnoy (4<sup>th</sup> November 1918) until the Armistice of 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. At this point, New Zealand had 58,129 troops in the field, and a further 10,000 in training.

As part of the post-conflict arrangements, the New Zealand Division continued through Belgium and into Germany where it undertook garrison duties in Cologne. In early 1919, the New Zealand Division returned to New Zealand. No 4 Company of the New Zealand Machine Corp was disbanded (February 1918), and its elements were re-designated companies (A Auckland, B Canterbury, C Otago and D Wellington) as part of a New Zealand Machine Gun Battalion. The Corps itself was disbanded in Germany (December 1918), and re-activated during the Second War (and equipped with the Vickers) before being disbanded in 1945.

In all, New Zealand lost 16,130 men and women killed in action (a casualty rate of 1.64 percent of the total population, and one of the highest during World War One) and 40,750 were wounded from a national population of only 1.2 million. New Zealand mobilised 110,000 personnel (men and women) for the conflict.

## National Recognition

A Certificate of Service was issued posthumously for Arthur Oliver signed by the Governor-General Lord Jellicoe and the Minister of Defence: see Annex A.

## Memorial recognition

Arthur's contribution is recorded at the:

- Imperial War Museum electronic Listing of the Fallen, Southall, London;
- Commonwealth War Cemetery Commission Debt of Honour website, London: see Annex A; and
- Wall of Tears at the Queen Elizabeth II Army Museum, Waiouru, contains Arthur's name and an oral Tribute from the Nation.

And also:

- New Zealand Memorial, Hyde Park corner (north eastern), London: see Annex A;
- Machine Gun Corp Memorial, Hyde Park corner (north eastern), London: see Annex A;
- Auckland War Memorial Museum – a plaque on the north-facing wall commemorating those commemorated at Polygon Wood; and
- National War Memorial, Wellington.

## Other recognitions

The names of Arthur Oliver (and Lance Corporal William John Russell) appeared in a List of 238 New Zealand Casualties in the *'Evening Post'* of 14 December 1917:

*'Oliver, A. S., 8/2458, Sgt, M.G.C. (J. S. Oliver, Burlington Café, Wellington, b.), 24<sup>th</sup> November (1917).'*

The List shows that on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1917, fourteen men from the Otago Infantry Regiment lost their lives. The majority are buried in the Buttes New British Cemetery and others at the Tyne Cot Cemetery.

On the first anniversary of his death, the following In Memoriam appeared in the *'Evening Post'* of 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1918:

*'Oliver – In loving memory of Sergt. A. S. Oliver, 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, who was killed in France on 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1917. Inserted by his loving sisters and brothers'.*

### **Metallic recognition**

Arthur Oliver's brother John received Arthur's World War One medals – the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal 1914/1920 and the Victory Medal 1914-1919. Post-World War One British service personnel knew these medals collectively as *'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred'*: see Annex A.

Arthur Oliver's medals and other memorabilia were subsequently sent to a branch of the Oliver family (Smyrk) who settled in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales, Australia. In the 1970s, the 1914/15 Star only (with Arthur's name on the reverse side) and memorabilia were sent to Arthur Oliver's nephew (Arthur Pleasant Oliver). In 1998, the New Zealand Defence Force posted the Gallipoli Medallion to his nephew (Arthur Pleasant Oliver).

In September 2005, Arthur Scott Oliver's great-nephew (Peter Arthur Oliver) purchased blank copies of the two missing medals - British War Medal and Victory Medal (World War One) - from Mr Alf Abel, Hillside Medals and Badges, P O Box 18 832, New Brighton, Christchurch. In December 2005, Mr Howard Chamberlain, 470 Te Moana Road, Waikanae, court mounted the four medals and located them in a frame.

Peter Oliver holds the four medals (see photograph in Annex A) and other memorabilia mentioned above.

### **Family Records**

Arthur's many descendants live in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Descendants of Arthur Scott Oliver served in the Second World War - the Royal New Zealand Navy, the New Zealand and Australian Armies, the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the New Zealand Home Guard and National Service schemes - and post-World War Two in the Regular and Territorial Forces of the New Zealand Army and the British Territorial Army, including New Zealand Defence Force contingents to East Timor (2001) and the Solomon Islands (2009).

23 October 2012

## LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

### Annex A - References

Photograph of James and Susan Oliver and two children (possibly elder brother John or George Oliver) and Lillian Oliver (?), taken in Dunedin

Group photograph of Arthur Scott Oliver with one brother and sister (about 1898/1902), taken in Dunedin

Photocopy of the Military Personnel File of 8/2458 Sergeant Arthur Scott Oliver, 4<sup>th</sup> Company (D), New Zealand Machine Gun Corps (1915 to 1917): these files do not include the medical and conduct sheets

Details of the Zealandia Private Hotel, Wellington, and current site

*'Call to Arms, Response in Wellington, List of Regulations: Under the New System'*, *'Evening Post'*, Wellington, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1915

Nominal Rolls of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Volume One, for the period 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1915, showing Arthur Scott Oliver

Details of three New Zealand troop ships (1916)

Overview of New Zealand Army (1914 to 1918)

The Gallipoli Campaign, 1915

Letter to Lily (Lillian) and Margaret (Maggie) Oliver (6<sup>th</sup> November 1915)

Details of the Lewis machine guns, Wikipedia

Map of the Suez Canal, Egypt

Map of France

Letter from Arthur Scott Oliver to Maggie (18 May 1916) sent from France

Map of Northeastern France and Western Belgium

Codford Camp (or Hospital), Salisbury Plains, England

The Battles and Monuments of the Ypres Salient

Belton House and Camp, Lincolnshire, England

Photograph of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company, New Zealand Machine Gun Corp, Armentières, France, June 1916 (Arthur was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Company, for which no photograph appears available).

Details of the Vickers machine gun, Wikipedia

Photograph of New Zealand soldiers in the snow (France or Belgium 1916/1917)

Only known photograph of Arthur (as a full corporal) with three colleagues: he is seated on the right-hand side (mid 1917?)

Letter from 24/303 Sergeant Alan H Thomas, No 4, New Zealand Machine Gun Corps to John Oliver (dated 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917)

Details of the Mud Corner Cemetery, Warneton, Belgium

Certificate in memory of 8/2458 Sergeant Arthur Scott Oliver, No 4, New Zealand Machine Gun Corps, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, London

Certificate in memory of 29655 Lance Corporal William John Russell, No 4, New Zealand Machine Gun Corps, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, London

Details of the Buttes New British Cemetery, Polygon Wood, Belgium

Photographs of Polygon Wood (2003 and 2010)

Photo of Arthur Scott Oliver's four medals (1915/1918) and supporting item from New Zealand Army News (2006)

Original and photocopy of the New Zealand Government's Certificate of Thanks (1918/19)

War Memorials – Auckland War Memorial Museum – plaque commemorating those who fell in the Polygon Woods area

Photographs of the New Zealand Memorial, Hyde Park, London (2010)

Photographs of the Machine Gun Corp Memorial, Hyde Park, London (2010)

New Zealand Machine Gun Corp casualties (1914 to 1918) showing Arthur Scott Oliver and William John Russell

Photographs taken during visits to the Buttes New British Cemetery, Polygon Wood, Belgium

## Annex B – Sources

Information on New Zealand Defence Force Military Personnel Files: use the 'Simple Search' option at <http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz>. The Personnel Records of Arthur Scott Oliver are now held in the National Archives, Wellington, Agency reference AABK, Series 18805, Accession W5549, Box 98 and Record 0088242

Nominal Rolls of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (WWI), Volume One, Wellington, New Zealand Government Printer, 1914 to 1919. There is a copy in the Library, Headquarters, New Zealand Defence Force, Corner of Aitken and Mulgrave Streets, Wellington, Telephone (04) 496 0999, and these can also be access online from Victoria University, Wellington

*'Call to Arms', 'Evening Post', Wellington of 19<sup>th</sup> March 1915*

*'The Official History of the Otago Regiment, NZEF in the Great War, 1914 to 1918', provides a graphic account of events throughout the Gallipoli campaign, online from Victoria University, Wellington*

*The Official History of the Canterbury Regiment, NZEF in the Great War, 1914 to 1918', provides a graphic account of events throughout the Gallipoli campaign, online from Victoria University, Wellington*

*'New Zealand Division History, World War One', [www.ake.quik.co.nz](http://www.ake.quik.co.nz)*

*'Gallipoli: The Battlefield Guide', Mat McLachlan, (also author of 'Walking with the ANZACs', Hachette, Australia, 2010*

*Gallipoli: The Battlefield Guide', Mat McLachlan, Hachette, Australia, 2010*

*'The Gallipoli Campaign, 1915', Commonwealth War Graves Commission, London, 2008*

*'The Official History of the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade', online from Victoria University, Wellington*

*'With the Machine Gunners in France and Palestine – The Official History of the New Zealand Machine Corps in the Great War - 1914 to 1918', by Major J H Luxford, Whitcombe and Tombs, 1923, online from Victoria University, Wellington*

*'Devils on Horses: In the Words of the ANZACS in the Middle East 1916-19', LTCOL Terry Kinloch, Exisle Publishing, New Zealand, 2008*

*'On My Way to the Somme: New Zealanders and the Bloody Offensive of 1916', Andrew MacDonald, Harper Collins Publishers, 2005*

*'The Battle of Flers-Courcelle', Wikipedia*

*'Kiwi Battlefields'*, Ron Palenski, Holder Moa, Hachette New Zealand Limited, 2011

In *'The War Effort of New Zealand'* – published as part of *'New Zealand in the First World War 1914 – 1918'*, Chapter XV on *'The New Zealand Camps in England'*, online from Victoria University, Wellington

*Nursing in New Zealand: History and Reminiscences, Chapter XXXIX on New Zealand Hospitals in England and France'*, online from Victoria University, Wellington

*'From the Uttermost Ends of the Earth'* John Gray, Wilson Scott Publishers, New Zealand

*'The Great Wrong War: New Zealand Society in World War One'*, Steven Eldred-Grigg, Random House Publishers, New Zealand

*'New Zealand's Great War'*, John Crawford and Ian McGibbon

*'The Battle and Memorials of the Ypres Salient'*, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, London

Imperial War Museum and Commonwealth War Cemetery Commission records

Auckland War Memorial Museum – database provides details of casualties, embarkation nominal rolls, some photographs, etc