

## **In honour's cause I fall at last, for England, home, and beauty<sup>1</sup>**

Before the First World War, the Hunter family owned and worked the farm and orchards of the Sonoma Estate in Greenhithe and operated the ferry service that connected Albany and Greenhithe to downtown Auckland. Roland, Sydney and Oscar were the fifth, seventh and eighth sons of Thomas and Annie Hunter. Roland fought with the Auckland Mounted Rifles Regiment in Gallipoli and was killed in the last major action of that campaign. Oscar was with the Auckland Infantry Regiment in New Zealand's first campaign in France. He was killed after two months of continuous service on the front line. Sydney was wounded twice, at Gallipoli and in France, and was the only brother to return home.



Hunter family in Greenhithe c. 1910.

Clockwise from top: Bertram, Roland, Cecil, Oscar, Sydney, Mabel, Thomas and Annie.  
The two oldest sons, Arthur and Norman, are absent

Thomas and Annie Hunter arrived in Auckland in 1882 on the clipper 'Margaret Galbraith' with their sons James and Arthur. In 1902 they moved to Greenhithe with seven surviving

---

<sup>1</sup> See extract from Roland Hunter's last letter to his mother below. The quote is from "The Death of Nelson", by S.J. Arnold and John Braham.

children where they purchased 121 acres of land including orchards and a homestead. The orchards had been established after 1891 by Ernest Miller, the manager of the Colonial Sugar Refinery at Chelsea. The homestead, situated near what is now Thomas Hunter Drive, was built after 1898 by Alfred and Sarah Hewson. The Hunters worked in both Greenhithe on the orchards and in Auckland in the timber industry. From 1908 they operated launches between the upper harbour and Auckland that provided a daily passenger and mail service to Auckland and a freight service to Riverhead and Albany.



Roland Hunter  
Reg. No. 13/694

Roland Hunter worked on the family orchards and was a member of the Seddon Horse Mounted Rifles, a volunteer force established in 1900 and named in honour of New Zealand's then Premier. He enlisted in the 3rd Auckland Mounted Rifles on 20 October 1914, just three months after the start of the War. His brother, Sydney, enlisted on 15 December, also with the Auckland Mounted Rifles. Roland left New Zealand on 14 December 1914 as part of the Second Reinforcements of 105 men and 130 horses and arrived in Egypt on 30 January 1915. He was there until 11 April when the Auckland Mounted Rifles departed from Zeitoun Camp on the outskirts of Cairo for the Dardanelles, leaving their horses behind. They landed at Gallipoli in mid-May. Roland saw action between May and July, earning a reputation among his friends as "hot stuff". His brother wrote home that Roland was "upholding the family traditions in a way I can never hope to equal". Roland was hospitalised on Lemnos at the start of August, and so

missed the New Zealand action at Chunuk Bair from which only 22 of 288 Auckland Mounted Rifles survived. He returned to duty at Gallipoli on 13 August.

On 23 August the remnants and reinforcements of the Auckland Mounted Rifles moved into the front line with other New Zealand and Australian troops in the northern Suvla area. On 27 August, they were in the first wave of an attack on Kaiajik Aghala or Hill 60, the final offensive action of the Gallipoli campaign. Just before the attack, Roland wrote his last letter to his mother from the trenches on Hill 60:

*“Well mother, we are going to make another charge tonight ... and if I have my usual luck I ought to get through all right. If I don’t – well you will know I will have done my bit for Home & Beauty etc. I am getting quite accustomed to men being killed and wounded alongside me that I am getting quite callous, which is the best way after all. I have lost all my old mates now.”*

In the next trench was his brother Sydney, who had arrived at Gallipoli with the fourth reinforcements on 23 August, and his friend Cliff Low from Albany.



Hill 60 New Zealand memorial, Gallipoli

Roland’s “usual luck” failed. He was killed, probably on 27 August, though his body was not recovered. He was 28 years old. His name is engraved on the front of the Hill 60 New Zealand Memorial, one of 183 New Zealand soldiers killed during the battle that also claimed the great uncle of former Prime Minister Helen Clark. Sydney was wounded on 28 August and evacuated to Britain. Cliff Low was wounded and died on 30 August. In Greenhithe, resident Captain

Charles Cotton and the community remembered Roland by planting an oak tree outside the community hall marked with a brass plaque as “Roly’s Oak”. The plaque was later moved to the Greenhithe War Memorial Park in Roland Road but went missing in the 1970s.



Oscar Hunter  
Reg. No. 13/2814

Oscar Hunter also worked on the family farm and orchards. In 1913, when Greenhithe residents decided to establish a community centre, he was appointed treasurer of the building committee. When the community hall opened in 1914 he was the first secretary. He enlisted in the Auckland Mounted Rifles on 12 October 1915, just six weeks after his brother had been killed. Oscar left New Zealand on 8 January 1916 as part of the Ninth Reinforcements and was in Egypt from February until April where he transferred to the Second Battalion of the Auckland Infantry Regiment. On 8 April the Regiment was moved to France and posted to Armentieres on the Belgian border. In May they relieved British troops in trenches facing a German corps whose advance into Belgium had been stopped at a line running between Lille and Messines.

Oscar was killed in action on 7 July 1916. He was 25 years old. K.C. Jorgensen, who was wounded on the same day, later wrote to Thomas Hunter:

*“I was doing duty on the same post as your son Oscar, at the time of his death...  
Your son had won many friends among the boys, as had also Arnold Mills, Hanley*

*Long and William Hobson, the four being on duty together at the time of their death, they were sterling good soldiers, always doing their utmost, always cheering their fellows, ... our platoon feels, that in them, we lost four of the best, they did their duty to the last."*



Oscar Hunter's grave immediately after the war and as it is today, Cité Bon Jean Cemetery, Armentieres

Oscar was buried in Cité Bon Jean Cemetery in Armentières, Northern France. His grave is alongside those of A.E. Mills, S.R. Long and T.W. Hobson. On 13 August the New Zealand Division left Armentières after a continuous stay of 3 months on the front. During this time they had sustained 2500 casualties with over 400 killed and missing. They were redeployed to join the offensive on the Somme.

The Hunter family's contribution to World War I is remembered in Greenhithe and Albany. Roland Road runs from the Greenhithe Road, past the Greenhithe War Memorial Park and the entrance to Thomas Hunter Avenue, before turning west into Oscar Road that continues as far as Lucas Creek. The two roads run through the centre of what was the Sonoma Estate. Their names appear on the marble tablet inside the Albany War Memorial Library erected by the people of the neighbourhood and opened in 1922. They were also remembered with three other Greenhithe residents killed during the war on the Memorial Arch erected outside the Community Hall in 1948. The plaques from this Arch were moved to the Greenhithe War Memorial Park in 1955.



The first Greenhithe war memorial outside the Greenhithe community hall



Memorial gates at the entrance to the Greenhithe War Memorial Park in Roland Road which incorporate the plaques from the old memorial

In 1920, the Hunter's sold all but 35 acres of the Sonoma estate. The block, named 'Denholme', included the two roads dedicated to Roland and Oscar. The remaining portion of the estate was subdivided in 1932, though the 26 acres of what is now Kingfisher Grove remained with the Hunter family until 1973. The launch service was continued by the family until 1927.

Prepared by: Chris Turnbull, Norma Turnbull (née Hunter), Joan Friedrichs (née Hunter)

December 2015

## Sources

New Zealand Defence Force, Personnel Records; preserved by Archives New Zealand.

“The Story of Two Campaigns”: Official war history of the Auckland Mounted Rifles Regiment, 1914 - 1919 in the Battlefields of Gallipoli, Sinai and Palestine during WWI; Sergeant. C. G. Nicol; Wilson and Horton 1921.

The New Zealand Division 1916 – 1919: A Popular History Based on Official Records; Col. H. Stewart, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C.; Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 1921.

'Greenhithe War Memorial Park', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/greenhithe-war-memorial-park>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 8-Oct-2015.

'Albany War Memorial Library', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/albany-war-memorial-library>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 3-Sep-2015.

Tauhinu. A History of Greenhithe. R.E. King. December 1984.