

**Source:** A letter included with the will of Leslie Andrew Watson held at the National Archives, New Zealand.

On Active Service letterhead  
(written at NZ Forces Club, Cairo)

5<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance  
NZEAF  
Middle East Unit  
June 3 (1941)

Dear Dad,

I don't know how to begin this letter to you as I am sure you will be very upset as I am over Les being killed. I am very thankful to have got away from the trouble for the present at least as so many of our unit have been taken prisoners.

The experiences have been terrible but I will not dwell on that at present.. It was not possible for me to send off a cable telling directly of Les's death as that is done through official channels and you will probably have heard by that means before now. My cable sent this morning would confirm that.

The last time I saw Les was about two days before the invasion of Crete. I was in bed off colour and he spent an hour or two with me and was well and happy. The next day my unit marched a few miles from our position separating our units by about 10 miles. On the morning of the invasion Les's unit and all the hospital near by were captured by parachutists who landed in their area. Les was one of the captured and narrowly escaped injury that day. His O. C. was killed. After about 6 hours our units cleaned up the enemy and our lads were released. They formed a dressing station about ½ a mile from their original position and carried on there. We worked in another area completely cut off. In the end we decided to try and get out with the wounded so with all our wounded on trucks covered with red + flags we set off at dawn and the German planes let us go. It was the early morning on the 23<sup>rd</sup> we put the wounded in hospitals and then settled on the original 6<sup>th</sup> F. Amb site. Les was there at dawn to get some of his clothes etc and he was talking to our Padre who arrived some time before me. I was relieved to hear from the Padre when I arrived later that Les was O.K. and I intended to go and see him later in the day. About 10.30 a terrific bombing and machine gunning of our area commenced and went on for some 2 hours. The most terrible experience I have known. I thought all my lads would be killed. One of my lads had his legs shot away and died later. We got out of that position during a lull and started a hospital. I was just about dropping as like most of the others we had had very little sleep for days. About 7pm the Padre called me to his room and told me that Les had been killed. It was a terrible blow to me but I stuck to the job most of the night although I was not much use. I could not get over to find out details and that worried me. In fact things went from bad to worse and I never got over to find out about Les. German mortar shells and bullets were flying around our building and in the end we had to march out in a big hurry at night past the spot where Les was killed. The next morning the 6<sup>th</sup> F Amb joined us and one of Les's close friends told me all about it.

When the bombing started two light tanks pulled into the ambulance area for shelter but were spotted by the planes who gave them all they (-) bombs and machine guns. Les and the lads sheltered behind trees but Les and another fine lad a mate of his (corner ripped off original letter) it. Les had a very large wound in the head and was killed instantly. It was thought that it was done by both bomb and machine gun.

The boys gave Les a good burial the service being read by Padre Hopkins of Anglican Church. A bottle was placed at the head of the grave and a paper bearing name etc placed in it. It was situated about 1½ miles west of Canea near where a little stream enters the sea. I did not see it

myself as this area was in German hands a few hours after we passed that way. The Padre with the doctor who was with Les Mr Ballantyne were both taken prisoner so I could not ask them about it.

And so Dad another of has gone to rest. Killed in action – action to his fellow comrades and devotion to the higher service of the God who has now taken him unto himself.

Everyone spoke well of Les and I am really proud of the great work he did. Words I overheard were – “it is always the best that are taken.” Many told me both before and after his death that he was the finest nursing orderly in his unit. A doctor in No 7 English hospital where Les worked of recent weeks also told me what an excellent worker he was. Always keen and full of energy he did not expend on himself.

I was thrilled one day when he and I worked together in the operating theatre at Kammena Vourla in Greece to see how efficient he was. He was a great lad and a brave lad and a fine Christian example to his mates to the last. I know from my contacts with them that everyone loved and respected him and his sudden end was to them as it is to us a grievous blow. But Dad let us take heart for God will be with us now even as He has been in sorrow of days gone by.

I thank Him that I have been delivered from such great dangers and feel that there is work for me to do. He wipes the tears from every eye and I know Dad you have the greatest courage of any man I know and from every blow you rise smiling. May God help you to do so now.

My first thoughts were for Eve and I pray that God will heal the wound this tragedy will cause. I have not time now to write to her but I know you will hand this information on and give her my sympathy and love.

My writing is rather late but this could not be avoided and is none the less sincere.

I don't know what the future holds for us but I shall continue to pray that all this trouble will soon come to an end.

That is all I can say just now. My love to our dear friends. Have written Ethel today also. She will be a comfort to you I know. Ever your loving son Aubrey.