

LESLIE GOLDIE CLARK
Private, Auckland Infantry Regiment



Leslie Goldie Clark was the first member of the Waiiau Pa/Karaka Clark family to be killed in action.

Already serving as a private in D Company of the 16th Waikato Regiment, New Zealand Territorial Army, he volunteered for service overseas as soon as war broke out in August 1914. At the time he was working on a farm for Mr J.C. Brown at Runciman, Karaka. After undergoing a medical examination, he was formally attested and enlisted into the New Zealand Expeditionary Force on 18 September 1914, with the new service number 12/707. The unit then commenced training at Alexandra Park in preparation for service overseas.

Auckland was directed by the Defence Department to provide an infantry battalion of four companies for the new force. Each of these companies would represent one of the four local regiments within the Auckland region, retaining the names and badges of the units from which they were drawn. Private Leslie Clark was therefore posted into 16th (Waikato) Company under the command of Captain MacDonald. When combined with the newly raised Wellington, Canterbury and Otago Battalions, the Aucklanders would form part of the 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade. Alongside a Mounted Rifles Brigade and supporting units, the force comprised New Zealand's initial contribution to the War in Europe.

Private Leslie Clark sailed from Wellington as part of the Main Body on 16 October 1914. The convoy sailed under the protection of a naval escort and stopped in Australia where it was combined with ships transporting the Australian Imperial Force. This large flotilla departed Albany, Western Australia on 1 November, and struck out across the Indian Ocean. The fleet was immediately under threat from warships of the German East Asian Squadron, and *HMAS Sydney* split off from the convoy to intercept the German light cruiser *SMS Emden* in a fierce naval engagement near the Cocos Islands on 9 November. With the *Emden* sunk, the convoy safely reached Colombo for refuelling and resupply on the 15th.

The New Zealand Government had raised the Expeditionary Force for service in France, but on route the convoy was redirected to Egypt. The arrival of colonial forces there would allow regular British Army units such as the 2nd Battalion Devonshire Regiment, to be released for immediate service on the Western Front. The New Zealanders sailed through the Suez Canal and disembarked at Alexandria on 3 December 1914. After travelling further east by train, the unit went into camp at Zeitoun on the outskirts of Cairo. Bivouacking in tents on the sand, it took some time to set up the camp. But within three days the infantry battalions started to undergo five to seven hours of vigorous daily military training, in preparation for the anticipated challenges ahead.

At the end of each day, members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force were provided the opportunity to do some local sightseeing. This frequently involved trips to the local tourist site of Heliopolis, the pyramids, or the bars of Cairo. Leslie Clark was late back from one such trip and was charged on 18 January 1915 with being “absent from roll call at 5.45 am” and “not compiling with an order from an NCO.” He was subsequently found guilty by Captain McDonald and awarded two days confinement to barracks (CB), which usually included extra fatigues and work around the camp for good measure.

On 26 January 1915, under its commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Plugge, the Auckland Infantry Battalion boarded a train for the Suez Canal. There they established a bivouac at Ismalia, and acted as a reserve force for Indian troops defending the Suez from Ottoman units attacking from the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula. During this period the New Zealand Expeditionary Force lost its first soldier killed by the enemy, but the Aucklanders saw no action and returned back to Zeitoun on 26 February.

In an effort to force the Ottoman Turks out of the War, First Sea Lord Winston Churchill initiated a naval campaign to lay siege to Constantinople in March 1915. Unfortunately, this fleet was unable to force the narrows of the Dardanelles and lost many of its warships to mines and coastal artillery. A decision was made to seize Cape Helles, using British forces currently in Egypt to knock out the local defences, and open the sea lanes to the Ottoman capital. To achieve this task the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force was hastily established under the command of General Sir Ian Hamilton, a hero of the Boer War in South Africa.

Mounted Rifles units were to remain in Egypt, but all kiwi infantry battalions and many of the supporting arms were reformed into an Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), under the command of Lieutenant General Birdwood. All leave had already been cancelled after the larrikins of the antipodes had ransacked the Cairo ‘red-light’ district, smashing belongings and setting fire to buildings. It is not known if Leslie Clark took any part in this fracas, but the event led many British officers to question the discipline of the ANZAC troops and their reliability as a fighting force.

The Auckland Battalion boarded the captured German liner *Lutzow* at Alexandria on 12 April and steamed for Mudros harbour. As the large flotilla gathered, rudimentary training was provided in boarding small boats and preparations made for the amphibious assault. Then, on the evening of 24 April 1915, supported by the battleship *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal*, the convoy left harbour and sailed for the Dardanelles.

Australian units led the ANZAC force ashore onto the beaches near Ari-Burnu point, with the Aucklanders the first kiwi unit to land, at 9am on 25 April 1915. Gathering on what would later be known as Anzac Cove, the Aucklanders were quickly pushed up towards the firing line to support the Australian units who were rapidly losing men as they came under sustained counter attack by Ottoman Turk forces. With the 16th (Waikato) Company in the lead, the unit pushed up Shrapnel gully where they came under artillery and rifle fire. Men quickly became intermixed, but the majority of Private Leslie Clark's company spent most of the first day defending the area known as Pope's Hill.

Casualties were heavy as the Anzac's held on to the small amount of territory they had been able to seize. The night was spent digging slit trenches for protection and engaging the Turks moving around in the scrub. Losses had been heavy, but reinforcements were starting to arrive in the forward firing lines. The next morning the Aucklanders were pulled back and tasked with establishing a defensive position on Plugge's Plateau—which had been named after their commanding officer. Stragglers continued to drift back in over the next few days from the front line, where the battalion had lost at least five officers and 73 men killed.

The unit remained on Plugge's for a number of days, before moving up to support an attack on Walker's Ridge on 1 May. In the end, they were not committed to the attack and instead reinforced Pope's Hill for a number of days, before the unit was ordered to retire to the beach. As the entire 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade assembled at Anzac Cove on 6 May, the troops were quickly transported by small boats to ships off shore. New Zealand's main fighting force at Gallipoli was to leave Anzac and sail to the bottom of Cape Helles where they would support a major British attack on the town of Krithia.

Krithia stood at the bottom of Achi Barba Hill, a key feature which dominated the British and French positions. On 7 May the British Regular Army 29th Division made a broad advance towards the hill, but gained only a small amount of ground at great cost. Then on the morning of 8 May, the 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade and 2nd Australian Infantry Brigade were thrown into the battle. Attacking in broad daylight, with limited artillery support and little coordination amongst major units, and across open ground swept by machine gun fire the likelihood of success was slim.

Just getting to the forward trenches for the final assault proved costly. Advancing over open terrain with limited cover, many men were hit by Ottoman fire before the main attack occurred. Then with the Wellington Battalion on the left, the Auckland Battalion in the middle and the Canterbury Battalion on the right (the Otago Battalion remained in reserve at the rear), the New Zealanders stood up and advanced in three waves towards to the invisible enemy positions in front of them. The area in front of the Auckland Battalion was covered in daisies and had been named by the British soldiers there as the 'Daisy Patch', but was soon covered in crumpled bodies.

Captain McDonald led the first wave of the 16th (Waikato) Company out of the forward trenches and was immediately wounded. In the middle of the resulting mayhem, Private Leslie Clark stood up and advanced in short rushes alongside the other members of his platoon. Then as machine gun fire raked across their ranks, he was hit by a bullet which penetrated a bible in his breast pocket, and he fell to the ground. Across the entire brigade

front, men tried to find cover where they lay, or retire under fire to the safety of the British trenches. By midday the New Zealand attack had ground to a halt. The Wellingtonians on the left had gained the most ground, while the Cantabrians on the right had made some gains, thanks to the cover provided by a dry stream bed. But everywhere the kiwis were still well short of the enemy positions. The Australians then launched their attack on the right and suffered a similar costly fate.

In the matter of just a few hours the New Zealanders had lost over 800 men, including 170 killed. The Auckland Battalion had suffered the worst of this toll, losing many of its officers—including Lieutenant Colonel Plugge who was wounded—and over 400 casualties, of which 67 were killed and a dozen would later die of their wounds. One of these men was Private Leslie Goldie Clark, killed in action on 8 May 1915 aged just 22, during one of the most courageous—yet futile—attacks of the War. Like many of those who fell around him at the Daisy Patch, his remains were never recovered, and he is instead commemorated on the memorial wall at Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery at Cape Helles. For his service he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. His family were presented a memorial plaque inscribed with his name, and his surname also appears on Karaka and Papakura war memorials, and on the wall of the Auckland War Memorial Museum in the Auckland Domain.



**PTE. L. G. CLARK,
16th, Waikato, Co.,
Killed in action.**

Auckland Times

DISTRICT NEWS

KARAKA.

A pathetic souvenir of the "Daisy Patch" at Gallipoli has come to hand among the personal effects of the late Private Leslie G Clark, formerly of Karaka, received by his brother-in-law, Mr D E Dobbins, Northcote. The souvenir is a Bible which was presented to the deceased soldier by the Hamilton school children on August 18th, 1914. When advancing with his company in the open on May 8th, Private Leslie Clark was killed, the bullet penetrating right through the bound volume of the Testament, which he carried in the pocket of his tunic, entered his body, and he died shortly afterwards. Private Clark, who at the time of his enlistment, was farming at Karaka, left with the main body, and was in the 16th Waikato Company. His eldest brother is with the Eighth Reinforcements and another has enlisted

Pukekohe & Waiuku Times

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