

JOSEPH REYNOLDS CLARK
Private, Otago Infantry Regiment



Joseph Reynolds Clark was the older brother of Leslie Goldie Clark and the second member of the Waiau Pa/Karaka Clark family to be killed in action.

Originally from Karaka, Joseph Clark was working with the Waihi Goldmining Company, maintaining the electric line from Horahora at the outbreak of the War. His father John Clark had passed away on 24 October 1914, just eight days after his younger brother Leslie had sailed with the Main Body for the Middle East. As the oldest son, Joseph Clark was now considered the head of the family and didn't need to enlist. At 38 years old, he was also quite old for a private soldier and unlikely to be conscripted, but he volunteered to fight soon after hearing of the death of his younger brother Leslie.

Joseph Clark underwent a military medical examination on 29 May 1915, but was rejected due to a need for dental surgery. This work took some time to arrange, and it wasn't until 30 July that the Officer Commanding No. 2 Group in the Defence Office at Paeroa could report that "Mr JR Clark of Waikino has had his teeth attended to and that they are now satisfactory." Finally attesting on 25 August 1915, Joseph Clark was sworn in and issued the service number 8/3215. Although initially photographed wearing the cap badge of the 6th Hauraki Regiment, which would have seen him join the Auckland Battalion like his younger brother, he instead joined D Company of the 8th Reinforcements from which the Otago Battalion drew its replacements. This change was likely caused by the delay in enlistment.

Joseph preceded by train to Trentham Camp at Upper Hutt for initial training. The main camp had only just re-opened after a major outbreak of measles and meningitis which killed 27 recruits. Much of the training was therefore conducted at tented satellite camps around the Hutt Valley and Wairarapa area, while the facilities at Trentham were improved and a new camp established at Featherston. Recruits spent most of their time learning foot drill, rifle marksmanship and infantry minor tactics. Discipline was strict, and soldiers were expected to unquestioningly follow the orders of their officers and NCOs.

After returning from final home leave, Private Joseph Clark boarded ship with the 8th Reinforcements and departed Wellington for overseas service on 12 November 1915. The convoy followed a similar route to the earlier transport flotillas and arrived in Suez on 20 December 1915. On arrival Joseph found he had arrived too late to serve at Gallipoli and fight against the Ottoman Turks who had killed his brother. The Australians and New Zealanders had been ordered to conduct an orderly withdraw of the Anzac sector on the night of 19 December, with the last soldier leaving the peninsula just before day break on 20 December 1915.

As Joseph Clark and the members of the 8th Reinforcements celebrated Christmas in Egypt, the weary members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force started to arrive back from the Dardanelles for rest and recuperation. A camp for the New Zealanders had been established at Moascar near Ismailia, and on New Year's Day 1916 Joseph Clark was posted there to join the rear-details Transport unit of the Otago Battalion. The new soldiers underwent additional training and awaited their final posting into infantry companies of the Battalion. These units were understandably in desperate need of reinforcements to replace the casualties they had suffered during their last few months on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

When they weren't training, the new reinforcements were allowed to take in the sights of Ismailia and Cairo. Like his brother before him, Joseph took this opportunity a bit too far and got into a fair amount of trouble. He was charged with "disorderly conduct and creating a disturbance in Ismailia" on 23 January 1916, "attempting to escape from custody", "being absent from stable parade" at 3.30 pm, and being absent from camp without a pass. He was found guilty, but instead of just being confined to barracks, he was sentenced to 21 days detention in the local detention camp. This punishment was the equivalent of 21 days in prison with constant inspections, parades and days of tough manual labour.

Joseph Clark had finally been posted to an infantry company on 27 January while awaiting trial, but was unable to join the 8th (Southland) Company properly until released from jail on 20 February 1916. He was immediately caught up in a period of hasty activity and reorganisation for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The government had approved the expansion of its main contribution to the War to a full infantry division for service in France and a mounted rifles brigade for service in Egypt and Palestine. The 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade would remain as it was, but some of its officers and men would be used to raise extra Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago Battalions for a 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade. With the addition of a newly arrived New Zealand Rifle Brigade and artillery units, it was now possible to field a full New Zealand Division for immediate employment.

The new division was officially formed on 1 March 1916 and received orders on 5 March to move location to Ferry Post Camp on the other side of the Suez Canal, where it would relieve the 2nd Australian Division. Private Joseph Clark remained as part of the 1st Otago Battalion which moved to Ferry Post on 8 March. There under the command of Captain Rice, his company helped secure the Suez Canal, and support the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade which held the front-line positions, in defence of any Ottoman military forces operating in the area. The New Zealand Division under Major General Russell, subsequently withdrew back to Moascar on 20 March and began preparations for movement to France.

Joseph Clark entrained with the 1st Otago Battalion at Ismailia on 5 April 1916 and travelled overnight to Port Said, where the following day the unit boarded transport ships for the voyage across the Mediterranean. The convoy arrived at Marseilles on 13 April and the troops immediately boarded trains destined for Northern France. The stop-start journey took them through some of the most beautiful scenery of central France, which gave little evidence of the scale of the conflict occurring in Belgium and its western provinces. The weary travellers arrived at Steenbecque at midnight on 16 April, and marched into camp near the village of Morbecque. Here the unit began training in the trench warfare skills it would need to face the Germans and received their first issue of steel helmets.

The New Zealand Division had been allocated a sector of the defensive line at Armentières, in the British zone south of Ypres, and almost directly on the French border with Belgium. They started relieving the British 17th Division on 14 May, with the 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade taking up position on the left, the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade on the right and the 3rd (Rifle) Brigade in reserve. Within the two front line brigades, battalions and their companies were regularly rotated through front line and support line 100 yards back, the subsidiary line 600 yards further back, and reserve positions in the rear. Initially the 1st Otago Battalion was placed into reserve for the 1st Brigade and took up billets in Armentières town.

Joseph Clark got its first taste of life in the forward areas when his unit relieved the 1st Auckland Battalion in the front line on the night of 21 May 1916. The handover occurred without incident, but from the following morning the 1st Otago Battalion came under intensive artillery and trench mortar fire. There was also the constant threat of German snipers, requiring the rapid development of the kiwi's own sniper and counter sniper units. While in the line, forward companies were required to maintain watches day and night, in addition to listening posts and patrols in no-man's land at night to counter the likelihood of any German attacks or raids. Men were frequently lost to enemy attacks and artillery fire.

The 1st Otago Battalion's front line responsibilities increased on 7 June, when they also relieved the 2nd Auckland Battalion from the brigade on their right. This change significantly increased the amount of forward trench line they had to hold, which now included the point closest to the German lines. Despite the added challenges, the unit maintained a particularly high tempo of patrolling, while also attempting to degrade the enemy's defences through artillery and trench mortar fire in order to increase the potential success of any raids. Raids were increasingly conducted by the New Zealanders as well as the British divisions on their flanks, but frequently resulted in retaliatory artillery fire on the forward and support areas, as well as the reserve areas near Armentières.

Joseph Clark and the 1st Otago's relinquished their forward position on 21 June after a month in the front lines, but were not out of danger even in the rear areas. The exact circumstances are unclear, but Joseph was admitted to the 2nd New Zealand Field Ambulance on the morning of 23 June 1916. He had wounds to his head, right arm and right leg, most likely from artillery shrapnel. He may have been hit while bivouacked in the rear or while withdrawing from the forward areas. Unfortunately, his condition was considered serious and so he was immediately transferred to No. 2 Casualty Clearing Station for medical treatment. Despite the best efforts of the doctors there, Private Joseph Reynolds

Clark died of his wounds at 1.20 pm. He was hastily buried in the nearby Bailleul Communal Cemetery in a ceremony officiated by the military chaplain Reverend Hall.

Within 18 months this part of the Clark family had lost a father and two sons. Despite not being required to serve overseas, Joseph Clark volunteered to do so anyway and paid the ultimate sacrifice, twenty days short of his 40th birthday. His burial details were passed on to the Graves Registration Committee and after the War his grave marker was replaced by an official commonwealth war graves headstone. Like his brother he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal for his service. His family were presented an additional memorial plaque inscribed with the name of a second son. Private Joseph Clark's name, now appears on the Karaka and Papakura war memorials, as well as on the wall of the Auckland War Memorial Museum in the Auckland Domain.



PTE. J. R. CLARK,
of Drury,
Died of wounds.

Auckland Times

MEN WHO HAVE FALLEN.

PRIVATE JOSEPH R. CLARK

PRIVATE Joseph Reynolds Clark, who was killed in action in France on June 21, was the eldest son of the late Mr. Joseph Clark, of Karaka, Drury, where his mother still resides. Private Clark, who was 42 years of age, left with the eighth reinforcements, being in the D Company, and on arrival in Egypt was drafted into the eighth, Southland, company, 1st Battalion Otago Regiment, of the 1st Infantry Brigade. He was born at Devonport, educated at the Archhill, Papakura, and Karaka schools, and followed the vocation of a farmer at Karaka until four years ago, since when he was engaged at Waikino in connection with the Waihi Gold Mining Company's electric power plant. A brother, Private Leslie G. Clark, of the 16th Waikatos, who left with the main body, was killed at Gallipoli on May 8, 1915, in the "Daisy Patch" engagement. The youngest brother, Private Alfred Colin Campbell Clark, of the A Company, 4th Platoon, left with the thirteenth reinforcements.

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