

Tamati Waka Nene Wirepa



Gunner / Bugler Thomas Wi # Regt No 16/486



Bugler THOMAS WI - WWI Regt No 16/486

This bugle belonged to Thomas Wi, a World War One veteran. Thomas was born on 2 November 1893 at Port Albert, Kaipara Harbour and raised in Te Kuiti in the King Country.

Thomas was the second eldest of twelve children. His mother, Rangiahua Hetet, was Ngati Maniapoto and his father, Michael Te Wehi Wehi Wirepakio, was Ngapuhi. His Maori name was Tamati Waka Nene Wirepa after his Ngapuhi ancestor, Chief Tamati Waka Nene who was influential in persuading the other chiefs to sign the Treaty of Waitangi on 6 February 1840.

At the age of twenty, Thomas enlisted as a Private on 19 October 1914 and was promoted to Bugler on 21 November the same year. He embarked with the First Maori Contingent aboard the SS *Wairimoo* for Egypt on 14 February 1915. After arriving in Egypt on 26 March, Thomas took part in the Gallipoli campaign when the Maori Contingent landed at Anzac Cove on 3 July 1915.

He would survive this campaign and go on to serve with the NZ Field Artillery Division Ammunition Column in France right through until 19 October 1918, when he was badly wounded in both his legs and feet by a shell blast. He was finally discharged in May 1919 because of the wounds he received in action.

Thomas was one of five brothers to enlist in World War One. His brother George was the only one not to return home, dying of pneumonia in 1918 in Brockenhurst, England. A further four younger brothers would enlist in World War Two. Like the rest of his brothers Thomas had a reputation for being tough and uncompromising, so it wasn't any surprise that he got himself into trouble from time to time. On one occasion he was awarded 28 Field Punishment No.1 (shackled in irons and tied to a fixed object for two hours per day, often known as crucifixion, due to its humiliating nature) for masquerading as a Company Sergeant Major.

After the war Thomas was allocated a War Pension due to the severity of his wounds. He would end up wearing special metal leg braces and shoes to enable him to walk and would carry the pain of those wounds for the rest of his life. He would go on to marry and have a family of five children. He is remembered by his family for his large vegetable gardens and the large eels he often caught and smoked. He is also remembered for his musical abilities, joining the Te Kuiti Municipal Band after the war and also being an excellent Mandolin player. He is fondly remembered as playing the last post on his bugle

at the funerals of a couple of his brothers, so it was sad for the family when the local RSA played a recording of it at his own funeral. He passed away in 1978, having lived a full life in spite of his severe war wounds, reaching the age of 85 years old.

His bugle remains in the possession of the family as a taonga (prized treasure) in memory of him.

A MAORI SOLDIER'S THANKS

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Some six months ago, Mrs G. Greig, of Camberwell road, made and packed a box containing a Christmas pudding. Her children subscribed the contents of their money boxes, and filled the box with little dainties. Not having any of her own people at the front, she sent the box to be given at the discretion of the staff officers to some member of a contingent. It was duly despatched, but until a day or two ago, Mrs Greig knew nothing of its fate. She then received from Bugler Thomas Wi, of the Maori Contingent, a quaintly worded letter of thanks. The letter is written in broken English, but its spirit is good and truly Maori in its thoughts and its mode of expression. It reads: "No doubt you will think who I am or what I am. However, this morning we was all issued with giff or unclaimed parcels, lucky I was to get your kind, so I thought I ought to let you know and thank you very much for been so kind to our soldiers. I cut the pudding up among seventeen of us and I can tell you we all enjoyed it. We all started talking about home, but still this is war time and you bet New Zealand will always be there every time. I congratulate this kind wishes of your three little ones and many happy bright year to you all. Some days perhaps will cheer you all up on our return to loving shore of land we adore. Hoping this will find you all in good health as we are all the same. Best wishes from your soldiers abroad Egypt."



References : http://www.wrhpc.org.nz/archive/data/album5/thomas_wi.htm

and

http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE20851153