

**ALFRED COLIN CAMPBELL CLARK**  
**Private, Auckland Infantry Regiment**



Alfred Colin Campbell Clark was the younger brother of Joseph Reynolds and Leslie Goldie Clark, and was the last of John Clark's sons to serve in the War.

Alfred Clark was helping run the family farm at Karaka when he decided to enlist. He volunteered and was sworn in at Auckland on 7 February 1916, aged just twenty and a half. As the third and last of the six Clark brothers to depart for overseas service, he left behind William, John, Robert and his six sisters to assist their mother. The siblings' support had become critical since the passing of their father in October 1914, and the death of Leslie at Gallipoli six months later. As a member of the 13<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements Alfred was issued the service number 23975 and posted to 4 Platoon, A Company, meaning he would also become a member of the Auckland Infantry Regiment, like Leslie before him.

On his arrival at Trentham Camp it was clear that the issues with sickness and infection which had plagued the Camp the previous year had not yet been fully resolved. Within a week of marching-in Alfred was admitted to the Trentham Camp Hospital with influenza. He remained in hospital from 15 February until being released on the 18<sup>th</sup>, but was re-admitted again overnight on the 20<sup>th</sup> for the same illness. At six foot and 12 stone Alfred was bigger than the two brothers who had preceded him into the Army, but his initial training was again interrupted when he was struck down with measles on 11 March 1916, and placed into quarantine in the Camp hospital once again.

The continued absences due to sickness significantly hampered Alfred Clark's military training, but his progress was sufficient to allow him to stay with his current draft of reinforcements. Much of his time was spent on the range, on long route marches, and enduring the myriad of uniform, equipment, tent and parade ground inspections to which new soldiers are subjected. After a small amount of final leave, he embarked on His Majesty's New Zealand Transport Ship (HMNZTS) *Willochra* and sailed from Wellington for overseas service on 27 May 1916. Unfortunately, Alfred fell ill again on route and was confined to the ship's hospital from 21 June to 5 July, missing the sights of the voyage.

The convoy arrived at Devonport, England on 26 July and the troops entrained for transport by rail from Plymouth, across Devon, to the town of Bulford on the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire. The 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements marched into Sling Camp, an annex to the large Bulford Camp the following day. The area would later be distinguished by a large kiwi dug into the chalk on a thereby hill, and was where new arrivals from New Zealand underwent about 30 days of additional training before heading for France. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown Alfred's stay here would be much longer, entailing three and a half months in the United Kingdom. It is also here at Sling Camp that he would likely have first learned of the death of his brother Joseph a month before his arrival.

Training at Sling involved route marches, bayonet practice and rifle range work similar to New Zealand. However, the new soldiers were soon introduced to other more dangerous training activities, including live grenade throwing and live fire attacks. Discipline was strict, the work long and tiring, and the weather usually grey and wet, even during the summer months. Leave was infrequent, but usually involved short trips to the nearby Stonehenge or Salisbury Cathedral. Alfred was posted out of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Auckland (Reserve) Battalion on 6 October 1916 to another holding unit and had to wait a further five weeks before he was finally shipped off to France on 14 November.

If the New Zealanders thought they were well trained when they reached France, they were in for a rude shock. After arriving at Boulogne Alfred Clark and his unit spent an uncomfortable first night at the Second Army Reinforcement Camp, nicknamed 'one blanket hill' for its poor bedding issue and appalling tent accommodation. The following day they travelled 32 kilometres by train to Etaples where they would spend the next couple of weeks with the New Zealand Infantry and General Base Depot. The training was tougher than any they had experienced to date, and was designed to test the new soldiers to the same requirements they would encounter in the trenches. In a training ground known as the 'bull ring' they practiced bomb throwing, musketry, gas drills, bayonet fighting, trench clearing, patrolling, sentry keeping and observing.

Private Alfred Clark was extremely fit and well prepared for the challenges ahead when he finally graduated from the bull ring. On 3 December 1916 he was posted to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Waikato) Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Auckland Battalion, which was part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Infantry Regiment. The unit had recently returned from playing its part in the Battle of the Somme at the beginning of October and was now preparing for winter near Armentières, just south of where they had previously served. When Alfred joined his battalion, they had just re-joined the Division in the Sailly-Fleurbaix sector and moved into billets at La Gorgue. They remained there for nearly three weeks, which was fortunate, as the winter weather with its sleet and snow was some of the coldest which had been experienced for some time.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Auckland Battalion then relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Auckland Battalion in the front line on 23 December, and Alfred spent a cold Christmas of 1916 facing off against the Germans over no-man's land. Thankfully this sector was well served by deep dugouts where the men could shelter from the artillery when not on duty. But the food and evening activities weren't particularly festive, as the enemy remained active all along the front. Alfred's experiences in

the front lines were likely similar to those of his older brother Joseph, with constant sniping, raiding, mortar fire and artillery barrages.

In the New Year the New Zealand Division underwent a minor reorganisation. Both battalions of the Auckland Regiment were moved into the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade, alongside both battalions of the Wellington Regiment. All of the Canterbury and Otago battalions were then moved into the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade—essentially creating North and South Island brigades. From that time on, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Auckland Battalions would frequently relieve each other in the front lines. But the weather was incredibly cold and the living conditions difficult throughout January 1917. The ground became so frozen that bullets would occasionally ricochet off it.

Then on 18 February the 2<sup>nd</sup> Auckland Battalion was withdrawn from the trenches in order to prepare for a large-scale raid on the German lines. Over 500 men would take part and Alfred Clark's 16<sup>th</sup> (Waikato) Company would be in the first wave alongside the men of the 6<sup>th</sup> (Hauraki) Company. The two remaining companies of the Battalion would cross behind them. They trained, received detailed orders and conducted rehearsals. Then at 2 am on the morning of 21 February 1917 they were woken, fed a quick breakfast and led to the front line. Pioneer parties had preceded them into no-man's land and cut lines through the barbed wire. Alfred's company commander Captain Hubbard ensured his men were assembled in the forward trench, and then continually checked his watch as he counted down the half hour till the final signal to attack.

As soon as the soldiers heard the opening salvo from their artillery they raced up rickety trench ladders over the parapet and rushed through the cut wire. The barrage devastated the German forward trench, so the Aucklanders encountered only moderate resistance there, allowing them to push on to the enemy's support lines. Unfortunately, the slight thaw made the going slow and muddy, with the German counter fire catching many of the second wave in the open. Then at the set time, officers blew their whistles to signal the withdraw while it was still dark and the raiders pulled back to their own lines, carrying wounded comrades and escorting any prisoners they had managed to secure.

The German artillery fire seemed to intensify during this final phase, and it was here when withdrawing to his own lines that Alfred Clark was hit. A splinter of shrapnel from a high explosive artillery round sliced through his back, hitting him in the spine. He fell in no-man's land and waited for stretcher bearers to collect him. There were so many injured men that not all could be collected before dawn, and the New Zealanders were luckily able to organise a short armistice with the enemy to allow them to collect the remainder of their wounded. As soon as Alfred was carried clear of the front line, he was transported to the Australian Casualty Clearing Station at Estaires where he received immediate surgery.

Alfred Clark was transported to the 13<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Bolougne the following day and listed as "dangerously ill." He remained there for 17 days until being transported by ship back to the United Kingdom. When admitted to the King George Hospital in London on 11 March 1917, he was still listed as dangerous ill and remained that way until 19 March when this was downgraded to serious. Alfred was extremely not to have shared the fate of his two

brothers. His chances of survival had been touch and go for nearly a month, and it was with some relief to his family that he assessed as "progressing favourably" on 31 March 1917.

On 13 April Alfred Clark was transferred to the New Zealand General Hospital at Mount Felix, Walton-on-Thames. There an x-ray examination determined that the surgery he had received at the casualty clearing station had not been successful in removing all foreign bodies from his spinal wound. Alfred was therefore transferred to the New Zealand Convalescent Hospital at Greg Towers, Hornchurch on 22 May for additional surgery. By 22 July he was receiving massage and regular exercise, and was assessed as making a steady recovery. Despite having lost feeling in his private parts and the rear of his right leg, by 9 November Alfred was able to walk with the aid of a cane. However, the slow progress must have been frustrating, as he was charged for "making an improper remark" on 8 October 1917 and awarded seven days confinement to barracks.

The Medical Board finally decided on 28 November 1917 that Private Alfred Clark was no longer fit for military service. He was granted two weeks leave before reporting to the New Zealand discharge depot at Torquay on 17 December. Boarding *HMNZTS Willochra* once again, he sailed from Liverpool on 1 February 1918 for home. Arriving in Auckland on 14 March he was granted seven days leave and subsequently transferred to King George V Hospital in Rotorua for further treatment. Finally discharged from the Army on 12 February 1919, he had to re-enlist again for further medical treatment in Rotorua on 27 September. Alfred Clark was discharged from the Army for the last time on 27 October 1919. He would forever carry a large scar across his back and walk with a slight limp. For his service he was awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.



PRIVATE A. C. C. CLARK,  
of the Thirteenth Reinforcements,  
recently reported wounded

*Auckland Star*

## FIGHTING FAMILIES.

### THREE KARAKA BROTHERS.

ADVICE has been received that Private Alfred Colin Clark, youngest son of Mrs. John Clark, of Karaka, who was seriously wounded in the spine on February 21, is now out of danger, and has been removed from a hospital at Bouloone to the King George Hospital, London. Private Clark is one of three brothers who have served the Empire in the present war. Prior to his enlistment he was farming at Karaka. His two brothers, Privates Leslie Goldie Clark and Joseph Reynolds Clark, have both given their lives in the patriotic cause. Leslie, who was killed on the famous Daisy Patch at Gallipoli, was farming at Karaka before he took up the military life, and Joseph, who was employed by the Waihi Gold Mining Company in the maintenance of the electric line from Horahora, died from wounds received in France. Their father, the late Mr. John Clark, took part in the Maori war.

*New Zealand Herald*  
29 March 1917