

This item appeared in several NZ newspapers in 1917.

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AN ACT OF CHIVALRY

Sapper J. E. MacManus, of Dunedin, writing to his wife from France relates the following touching incident:—

You may remember me telling you about a bombing raid which took place in September, 1916, in which Lieutenant Durant and Sergeant Powncenby, of the New Zealand Engineer Tunnelling, Company, took part in and were missing. I then expressed the opinion it was unlikely they were taken prisoner, as they were built of such stern stuff that they would die rather than surrender.

The conclusions I arrived at were correct. Since the great advance here previously referred to, I and a number of others from my section visited the graves of these men. Not far from a river, on a gentle rise, the Germans had buried our officer, our sergeant, a Tommy corporal, and a private side by side amid the ruins of an historic village. They bordered the well-kept grave with roof tiles, and planted on it some rose bushes. If loving hands had kept the graves in order, they could not be kept in a better condition than they were when left by the Germans. They placed at the head a beautiful wooden cross, and in the centre of the cross fastened an oval board, on which they wrote the following inscription:—

*Hier
ruhen vier tapfere Engländer,
Leutnant W. M. Durant,
New Zeal. E. 4-1223, ans Dunedin,
New Zealand,
Sowie Zwer Untffz u ein Mann,
Giffl a.m., 14-9-1916.*

What greater tribute to the memory of the fallen can be paid than an inscription stating “Here rests four brave Englishmen.” Such an act of chivalry is the one bright contrast to the horrible tales of German brutality which have disfigured their campaign since the commence of the war. When one thinks of their hymns of hate, their corpse utilisation factories their desecration of the dead, their violation and destruction of secret edifices, their rapings, barbaric cruelty to prisoners, whom they work under shell fire, their slave traffic with the conquered peoples, their acts of vandalism and unnamable horrors, their violations of treaties and international law designed to guide the conduct of belligerent nations; when one thinks of these acts which have blackened their name in the eyes of civilised people, and contrasts them with their action in paying such homage to the memory of these fallen New Zealanders and Englishmen, one would be inclined to conclude that the heroic conduct of Lieutenant Durant and Sergeant Powncenby, the Tommy corporal, and private, who all fought to the death, must have wrung from the

Germans the admiration of a stern and unrelenting foe. Such chivalrous tributes to brave foemen have at all times been considered to be the custom and guarantee of a brave people. We invariably paid homage to fallen opponents; but then a man, to be an airman, under modern war condition, must indeed be a brave man. And such chivalry is the outward and visible expression of bravery.

This is the first tribute it has been my lot to witness that has ever been paid by the Germans to a soldier. And when it is remembered that one of the soldiers from Zealand was born in New Zealand, was a product of Otago's soil, one must thrill with pride at the undaunted spirit and heroism of men that won admiration and respect from adversaries whose overwhelming numbers he faced to the end. The pride felt is greater not only because it proves New Zealand's sons possess the same indomitable spirit as the men from the British Isles, but also because these New Zealanders are members of the company to which I belong.

It is an immortal witness to the veneration paid by at least some of the German race to a brave opponent and it implies that there are some who, by such an example, can be said to show they possess "kultur" in spite of deeds of "frightfulness." that have made the name of German hideous to those who have followed their vile deeds. It is proof that in spite of the barbaric manner in which war has been waged the spirit of chivalry still lives in one or some, at least, of our opponents. It is evidence that Lieutenant Durant, Sergeant Powncenby, the Tommy corporal and private met foemen worthy of their steel, for no coward could pay homage to a brave opponent. While hymns of hate are being sung, it takes a brave men to do a chivalrous deed like that in his own country. Nearby is another grave, well cared for, and on the cross appears the following inscription.

*Hier ruhet
ien - Englischer
offizer,
Leutnant G. I. Slinger,
159 Brigade Konegl Feld Artl. Rgt.;
gelf im
Ocktb., 1916.*

I have witnessed many burials—I have noticed the touching regard of the French women for the venerated dead—but never have I witnessed an incident so touching as these unexpected expressions of admiration and respect by the Germans to fallen foemen.

* * *

The remains of William Macleish Durant were later reinterred in Point-Du-Jour Military Cemetery, Athies-les-Arras, France.