

GEORGE WILLIAM GARDNER

By Pam Slay (nee Gardner) - niece of George William Gardner

George William Gardner was born on 21st August 1894 in Pahiatua New Zealand to James William (Jim) and Rosina GARDNER (nee Bly). The eldest son with two older sisters, Milly and Elsie he spent his early childhood in the bush around Mangatinoka. He had 3 younger sisters Myrtle, Esme and Ena and 3 younger brothers, Hilton, Les and Lennie.

He started school at Hukanui when he was 5 years old. (Class records for Hukanui School are in Auckland Archives Ref: YCAF 4135 A221)

Around 1903 he moved with his family to Taoroa between the Taoroa and Mowhanga Rivers near Taihape where he probably attended Taoroa School as a school had been erected when the Gardner Brothers mill wrote to the education board telling them 30 children would be moving to the area.

About 1909 when the mill was cut out the family moved to Oio where Will lived and worked as a bushfeller for the mill until he went to war. His address being C/- J Davies Koputaroa which is near Levin before spending time with his family at the mill in Hukapapa. My Dad, Les, remembers him leaving the remote settlement of Oio for war. As he walked passed the school his brother Les as a 5-year-old was allowed to go into the playground to wave to him as his brother Will walked passed. Les knew he would not see Will for a long time.

George William Gardner No 26/447 enlisted with NZ Army on 9.10.1915 in B company 4th battalion 3rd NZ Rifle Brigade.

His chest measurements were 53 ½ inches to 57 inches. He weighed 11 stone with black hair and hazel eyes. He was 5 foot 7 ½ inches tall

Will Gardner as Les remembered his brother before he left Hukapapa for the war.

He Left NZ 5th February 1916 on the ship Mokoia and disembarked Suez 15th March 1916 then embarked Alexandria for Marseilles France on the "Alannia" on the 7th April 1916.

The Battalion travelled by train via Arles, Avignon, Orange, Vienne, Lyons, Macon, Dijon, Montereau, Corbeil, Juvisy (outskirts Paris) Creil, Clermoine, Longneau, Ameins, St Roch, Longpre, Abbeville, Etaples, Bifur d" Boulogne, St Omer, Bifur Wallon Capelle, Hazebrouck, Steenbecque and was billeted in the village Tannay Theinnes where he went into training at Estaires

He was admitted to hospital in Morbeque with Lumbago on 13th May 1916 and discharged on 21st rejoining his unit at Armentieres where he saw his first action and imagine his surprise when he was relieved on the battlefield in the Pont Ballot sub sector by his Uncle Bert's (Albert Pearson GARDNER) unit of 2nd Canterbury Regiment on 23rd May 1916. It is not known if they actually met.

Sent to Adu? Hospital 2.6.1916 and discharged 16.6.1916

They marched to Fricourt on Sep 9th which saw the unit in the front line "Sap A" inclusive to Cork Alley exclusive again they were relieved by Uncle Bert's Regiment.

12th – 14th September saw the attack on Flers when his battalion was in the Charlton and check trenches.

On the 15th September 1916 the NZ regiments joined the 4th Army and the NZ Rifle Brigade and portion of Canterbury Regiment was given the 2nd objective:

“A zig zag line from the junction of Fat trench with Flers Trench about 600 yards due west of Flers church, along Fat Trench, up Fish Alley, along Flag Lane and across to the Flers – High Wood road at a point about 300 yards west of its crossing with the Longueval Factory Corner Road.”

On 22 September 1916 his favourite uncle died of wounds after being injured in the trenches not far from Will. It is not known if Will actually knew what had happened.

The 4th NZRB was very successful. 18th & 19th September saw them in Switch Trench in pouring rain. They continued fighting in the trenches around Flers. Uncle Will fought in the Boutillerie Sector and Ploegsteer Sectors.

There is no mention of what he did after these events but it is thought he may have been laying communication in the trenches of Arras. There is some indication in his diary that he may have been in the tunnels and as this was very sensitive it may explain a gap in his war record. In the official history there is mention of some soldiers being withdrawn from their own unit and diverted to the tunnelling company.

He was in the trenches for the Battle of Messines on 5th May 1917 and admitted to NZ Wing Augerkein Camp hospital 4th June 1917 rejoining his unit on 18th June 1917. It is not known why.

On 4.7.1917 he was based at Lille Road sub sector and on 14 & 15th July the unit carried out a very successful raid opposite Lille Road Salient. The next night they were given the evening off to go into Armentieres to celebrate

He attended a Buzzer Course at Armentieres from 30th July 1917 to 8th August 1917. He was given leave and went to UK from 14th August 1917 to 27th August 1917.

He rejoined his unit saw action at Passchendale until he was transferred to base headquarters on 8.10.1917 to cover communications.

He was accidentally injured from falling over on 17th February in Ameins while on duty but was not to blame. He was admitted to Camiero Hospital on 25th February 1918 with a contused right knee and discharged two days later.

The 6th to the 19th March 1918 was spent in London recuperating.

The 9th till 15th March he went into training back in France then being readmitted to hospital on 6th April 1918. He was stationed at Noblou Depot Administration Estaples until 9th August 1918. During this time between the 19th and 27th May 1918 he was admitted to Camiero hospital with Scabies

On 6th June 1918 back to the field for a very short time then back to Estaples.

On 21st August 1918 he saw action keeping communications open again at the Battle of Bapaume, then the Battle of the Scarpe from 26th 30th August 1918. They moved on to Trescault Spur on 9th September then to the Battle of Cambria and the Hindenburg Line.

He was given leave to UK on from 20th September 1918 to 8th October 1918 returning to keep communications open in the Battle of the Selle River then on to Le Quesnoy on 24th October where he gained the Military Medal for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during operations from 25th to 28th October 1918.

Rifleman Gardner was a Battalion linesman and during these operations under very heavy shell fire and in much gas at all times of the day and night was called upon to mend the wires which were repeatedly being cut. At all times he cheerfully went through shell swept areas and managed to keep telephone communication between the Frontline Companies and Battalion Headquarters. His courage and coolness under shellfire inspired confidence in all ranks.

On 27th October, 1918 he was appointed to Lance Corporal shortly before the war ended. He was at Fontaine-au-Pire 15 miles south of Les Quesnoy when the telegram came to cease hostilities at 11am on 11th Day of November 1918. On 7 February 1919 he returned to Liverpool England to and embarked for NZ on Ajana 26th February 1919 arriving in NZ 27th August 1919.

He was overseas for 3 years and 50 days. When he returned to NZ his condition was described as fair and his knee was still swollen.

His personal war record can be found on Archway Website ref **R16784918**

He married Linda May Broadbelt on 5th Nov 1919 in Levin with son Norman being born the following year. They went on to have 5 more children and lived a very happy family life.

Later Uncle Will was remembered as being a very heavy "roll your own" smoker and grew his own tobacco. He was a keen gardener and made beautiful inlaid wooden objects. He never spoke of the war and now I can understand why.

He was a very quiet gentle man who was loved by everyone. He was devoted to his family. When Aunt Linda passed away in 1964 Will became greatly depressed. His brother Les was terribly worried about him as he became suicidal but thankfully it was not long that he rekindled a friendship and remarried a widowed family friend, Kathleen Margaret (Kath) and spent many happy years with her. Kath always called him Tim but it is not known why.

They both loved fishing. Gwen and Les and Pam and Mike spent many happy times with Will and Kath.

Will died on 17 Feb 1980 and is buried at Papatoetoe Cemetery.

A very humble George William Gardner never claimed his medals on entitlement as he felt the whole Battalion should have been awarded medals. It was not until much after the war the family accepted them. I believe these medals are with his daughter Rosie's family.

Rest in Peace Dear Uncle Will... You deserve it.

Bibliography:

Most of this information was passed from Leslie the brother of George William and memories of his niece Pam Slay (nee Gardner)

Dates have been estimated using birth certificates of various family members

Auckland Education Board: R22116640 YCAF 4135 A22153 / a

Register General Office - Gardner George William 1894/8877

Register General Office - Gardner George William and Broadbelt Linda May 1919/9041

NZ Defence Force - Gardner George William R16784918 AABK 18805 W553 910 0043410

NZ Defence Force – Gardner Albert Pearson R16784899 AABK18805 W5539 9 0043390The Official
History of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade

Mc Donald Wayne, "Honours and Awards to the NZEF in the Great War 1914-18 p113