



BERTIE'S STORY

Lance Corporal Bertie Huon Victor Harkess (11698)

Bertie was born in Lyttelton on 8th March 1897 to Thomas and Sibylla Harkess of 20 Reserve Terrace. Bertie attended Lyttelton District High School, and became a clerk, firstly for the Lyttelton Harbour Board, and then the National Mortgage and Agency Co. Ltd in Lyttelton. He was a keen footballer, a member of the Lyttelton Oddfellows Lodge, and a Territorial Forces Cadet. He was already serving in No. 4 Company Garrison Artillery when he enlisted in the Expeditionary Force on 13th January 1916.

Battle for Polderhoek Chateau

Posted to C Company of the Canterbury Infantry Battalion, Bertie trained at Featherston Camp before embarking on the SS *Ulimaroa* with the 12th Reinforcements on 1st May 1916 and arriving into Southampton, England in August. After a month in England Bertie was posted to the 13th Company, 1st Canterbury Battalion, and on 22nd September they were sent to the Somme in France to reinforce the Canterbury Infantry Regiment who had been fighting there since the 12th September.

Bertie's Battalion moved to Belgium and was subsequently at the battle for Messines in early June 1917 and then the third battle of Ypres (or Passchendaele). Bertie was promoted to Lance Corporal on 12th October, the day of the New Zealanders' attack on Bellevue Spur. Weeks of adverse weather had turned the front into a quagmire. As a result, the artillery failed to clear the German defences and machine guns, even falling short and shelling New Zealand troops, and the attack was a colossal failure. On this day, nearly 850 New Zealand men including at least four from Lyttelton were killed or lay dying in the mud of no man's land.

Throughout his time in the field, Bertie was in and out of hospital suffering from various illnesses. After the battle of Passchendaele, Bertie had two weeks leave in England and then a stint at Brigade School before re-joining his Battalion on 5th December during the attack on Polderhoek Chateau. This battle also failed due to inexperienced troops, lack of training, terrible weather, and the Batteries again inadvertently shelling their own lines.

Bertie was killed on that same day. He was standing in a trench when a shell landed right next to him. Bertie's death was confirmed at a hearing in January 1918, as a fellow soldier had identified Bertie's body by the leather jacket he was wearing.

Lyttelton Cenotaph

Bertie's body was never recovered and buried, however he is listed on the New Zealand Memorial in the Buttes New British Cemetery at Polygon Wood in Belgium, on his family headstone in the Lyttelton Anglican Cemetery in Canterbury Street, and amongst the 60 names on the Lyttelton Cenotaph.

The Lyttelton Fallen Soldiers Memorial Cenotaph, originally on Oxford Street at the corner of London Street, was unveiled by the Governor General Lord Jellicoe at the 1923 Anzac Day ceremony in front of approximately 2,000 Lyttelton residents including about 120 returned soldiers and sailors.



ROLL OF HONOUR. YESTERDAY'S LIST.

(PRESS ASSOCIATION TELEGRAM.)

WELLINGTON, January 14.
The following casualty list (No. 761)
was issued to-day:—

KILLED IN ACTION.

Result of Court of Enquiry:—
Previously reported missing, believed
killed, now reported killed in action:—
CANTERBURY REGIMENT.

(December 5th.)

Harkess, B. H. V., L.-Cpl. (Mrs T.
Harkess, Lyttelton, m.)

Previously reported wounded and
missing, believed killed, now reported
killed in action:—

Top left: H.M.N.Z.T. No. 42 SS *Ulimaroa*, undated. Postcard, Lyttelton Museum

Above: *Polderhoek Chateau*, 1915. Paul Reed, www.greatwarphotos.com

Top right: *Roll of Honour*, *The Press*, 15 January 1918, p.8 (detail). National Library of New Zealand, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>

Below: *Unveiling of the Lyttelton Cenotaph* by Lord Jellicoe, Anzac Day 1923. Photographic print, Lyttelton Museum

