



# WALTER'S STORY

## Bombardier Walter David Lester (2/327)

Walter was born on 13th August 1888, to Edward and Elizabeth Lester. He had numerous siblings including William Thomas, later an undertaker and painter, Lyttelton Borough Councillor, and three times Lyttelton Mayor. Walter worked for William as a painter before enlisting. Walter was a member of the Lyttelton Oddfellows, a friendly society. He also served in the Territorial Forces, firstly the Lyttelton Cadets, then the Naval Garrison Artillery, and as a Bombardier, in 'E' Battery of the New Zealand Field Artillery.

## Egypt, Gallipoli and the Western Front

Walter enlisted on 19th August 1914 and after training embarked 16th October 1914 on the SS *Limerick* with the 2nd Battery of the Field Artillery Brigade in the main body of the Expeditionary Force. They arrived in Egypt on 4th December and settled into a training camp near Cairo.

The Mediterranean Expeditionary Force left Egypt on 12th April 1915 and arrived at Gallipoli on 25th April. It was two days before the 2nd Battery could land, drag their guns up to the plateau, and begin to support the infantry. They remained there for eight months, through the May and August offensives, ammunition shortages, poor diet and lack of water, summer flies and dysentery, winter storms and frostbite. Only six days before the order to evacuate the Batteries was given on 10th December, Walter became ill and was transferred to hospital in Mudros, Greece. By the end of the campaign over 120,000 men had died, including 2,779 from New Zealand and at least seven from Lyttelton.

In early April 1916 the New Zealand Division was stationed for a time at Armentieres in northern France where Walter was promoted to Bombardier. In late August the Division moved to support the British and French at the Somme. Just prior to the second offensive on 12th September 1916, a preliminary attack was undertaken to straighten the line at the Front. During this attack Walter was shot in the face. Seriously ill, with a broken jaw, he was sent to England three days later. In the offensive that followed over 2,000 New Zealanders were killed, including at least another seven from Lyttelton.

## Hospital and Home

Walter was admitted to King George Hospital in London and stayed there for nine and a half months until he was transferred to No. 2 New Zealand General Hospital in Walton on Thames, near London. This hospital and the nearby Oatlands Park Hospital treated 27,000 patients before they closed after the end of the war.

Walter was declared unfit for service and released in January 1918. He arrived home on SS *Maunganui* on 19th March 1918 after being away for three and a half years. On his return, Walter worked again as a painter and in 1924 he married Jemima Dunbar Hill. They lived at 11 Hawkhurst Road in Lyttelton. Walter died in Cashmere on 28th May 1970.



Top: Walter Lester (right) at Giza, Egypt, c. 1915. Photographic print, Lyttelton Museum

Above: Roll of Honour, The Press, 25 September 1916, p.8 (detail). National Library of New Zealand, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>

Above right: Wounded soldiers including Walter Lester (second row, left) and nurses. Postcard, Lyttelton Museum

Right: Lyttelton News, The Press, 10 January 1918, p.9 (detail). National Library of New Zealand, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>

## LYTTELTON NEWS

**A WOUNDED SOLDIER'S HOBBY.**  
Some extremely clever art needlework executed by Private W. D. Lester, while in the King George Hospital, London, suffering from wounds, is now on display in the shop window of Mr J. T. Brice, London street. Private Lester, who is a brother of the Mayor of Lyttelton, left with the Main Body. He is at present in the Walton-on-Thames Hospital.