

Walter Henry Holmes White

My name is Walter, Walter Henry Holmes White, it's a long name, Henry and Holmes were the names of my grandfathers.

My parents were George and Eleanor, they were both from Cambridgeshire but for work reasons came down to Brixton in Devon, where I was born on 13th August 1889. My father was a Manservant and Coachman.

By 1901 we were living in St John, in Wolsdon Lodge, where my father worked as a chauffeur.

I grew up in the village, with my brother Edward, who was three years older than me. By 1911 I had left school and was working as an assistant schoolmaster, and my brother Edward joined the navy to become a shipwright.

But I decided that I needed some excitement in my life so I left home to work in New Zealand.

I got a job working on a farm at Pukekoke, which is near Auckland.

By 1915 the New Zealand Government were recruiting new volunteers for the army, as we had lost so many of our experienced soldiers earlier in the year at Gallipoli.

Before Conscription came into force in late 1915, I had volunteered to join the New Zealand army, had a medical check-up in March and awaited the call. This came some months later. On 15th June 1915 I was declared A1 Fit and joined the 1st Battalion of the Auckland Infantry Regiment.

On 9th October 1915, after four months training, we embarked by ship for Egypt, where the New Zealand troops evacuated from the Gallipoli Peninsula were regrouping and being strengthened before heading for France.

It was a quiet time there in Egypt, not too hot although there was a great deal of illness amongst the troops, and quite a few died of dysentery. I managed to get to see some Pyramids.

At last, on the 6th April 1916 we set sail from Alexandria for France, disembarking at Marseilles before travelling by train up north to the Western Front.

We were to fight in the imminent Battle of the Somme. We were based at Hazebrouck near Armentiers, an area where, until now, had been a quiet sector of the front.

We were in fairly good trenches, which were stable and well designed, but we always got soaked by flooding whenever it rained.

We spent some months here. We had 10 to 14 days in the frontline trench then had a week's reserve behind the lines, then back into the trenches for another 14 days, then reserve again, and so it went on, and on.

The weather remained dry but time dragged as we waited for the "final summer push" that we all knew was coming soon.

But we needed to be on our guard and had to send out raiding parties and patrols.

I was shot on 3rd July 1916 in No Man's Land.

It was virtually my first action.

My body could not be recovered and I am remembered at Cite Bonjean, on the New Zealand Memorial, which commemorates men of the New Zealand Division who died in the neighborhood of Armentiers, and who have no known grave.

I was killed in action, at twenty-seven.

My medals were forwarded to my dad in St John.