



De Last Post in het landschap

The Last Post in the landscape

17/06/2023

NEW ZEALAND MEMORIAL PARK MESEN

Hated at home, dead on a foreign field

Second Lieutenant George Wallace Bollinger was born on 10 April 1890 at Omata, New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand to Max Bollinger and Margaret Isabella Sproule.

George was educated at the New Plymouth High School and after leaving school, in 1906, became a clerk in the Bank of New South Wales.

His father, Max, had migrated to New Zealand from Altenkirchen, Bavaria, southern Germany, in the 1880s, joined the police and later farmed at Taranaki. The family consisted of 4 daughters and 3 sons, including George and Herman.

George Bollinger volunteered for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force on 14 August 1914, nine days after the declaration of war and within a month of his enlistment, the Defense Department received a complaint about his supposed German sympathies. A subsequent investigation found Bollinger to be of 'very good' character.

After leaving the country with the Main body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in October 1914, Bollinger kept a detailed diary while on active service. His accounts, particularly of Gallipoli, document superbly the experiences and shifting attitudes of a New Zealand soldier during the campaign.

George Bollinger's Gallipoli diary, Chunuk Bair:

"Sunday 25th April. The day is beautifully fine. We are steaming full speed, close to the southern shores of Gallipoli. What a day of days! We left Lemnos at 6.00 am and continuously from 8.00 am we have moved amongst a roar of thunder. At present we are within a very few miles of our warships and transports, which are stationary here. What a sight! Their big guns never cease, and as we see the flash and burst of the shells on land, we think thousands of Turks must be going under. Has ever a bombardment like this taken place before? Our men are very calm, and some are even lying about reading and taking no notice of the bombardment. Boom, boom, boom. It never ceases. What batteries could reply to these 15-inch mouths of destruction.

Monday 26th April 3.15 am. 'Packs on' was roared out. Torpedo destroyers are alongside to take us ashore. 9.40 am. On shore in the thick of it. The first casualty in our company was in my section. Just before dawn we were on the destroyers waiting for surf boats to take us ashore. Stray bullets were landing around us and suddenly

Stray bullets were landing around us and suddenly Private Tohill who was standing just in front of me dropped with a bullet through his shoulder. Immediately after, Private Swayne was shot in the forehead. It was a relief to get ashore. The Australians were frightfully cut about effecting a landing yesterday.

They say there are at least 6000 casualties. They did heroic work and the whole world will know of it. We are in a gully immediately behind the firing line and will be called in to relieve at any moment. Two New Zealand battalions were in last night and got cut about. The Turks have overwhelming numbers and it is a perfect wonder how the Australians captured these heights. In landing as many as 49 were killed in one boat and a whole regiment was practically wiped out. The din and roar and whistle of the missiles is awful. As we sit here the ambulance are passing with wounded on the stretchers. 5.00 pm. We climbed heights to take our place in reserve, to firing line. We are right in the fire zone and saw some awful sights.

Tuesday 27th April at daylight this morning a terrific artillery duel raged. The Turks put hundreds of shells onto our landing place. At 10.00 am we were marched north along the beach, and as we got under heights we met crowds of wounded coming down. Oh, how callous one gets. Word rushed down from above for Hawkes Bay and Wellington-West Coast Companies to reinforce at the double, as our fellows were getting massacred. We threw off packs and forgot everything in that climb up the cliffs. We fixed bayonets on reaching top and got into it. The country is terribly hilly and covered with scrub from four to five feet high. On we rushed against a rain of bullets and our men began to drop over, before they fired a shot. We started to get mixed and were everywhere amongst the Australians. Our men were dropping in hundreds.



*George at Chunuk
Bair, Gallipoli 1915*

Wednesday 28th April We were relieved about 8 o'clock. Mostly our nerves were gone. We retired back and tried to rest: our casualties were very heavy. We manned the trenches again at 6 o'clock. No sleep and nothing to eat, just a craving for drink, and the wounded always empty our bottles.

The Turkish trenches are now on a ridge about 200 yards away. Our warships are shelling them, but unfortunately have also accounted for a number of our casualties."

Following the withdrawal from Gallipoli, George Bollinger returned to New Zealand for officer training. He was gazetted Second Lieutenant in April 1916, he took up a post as an instructor at Trentham Camp, near Wellington.

Publicity surrounding his promotion led to further insinuations by anti-German campaigners. In Taranaki, the Bollinger family had rocks thrown at their home, partly spurring their move to Khandallah.

Wellington,
New Plymouth,
April 14th, 1916.

Madame Bouefve :

Dear Madam,

I understand that you take an active part in seeing that Germans do not enter our army. This being the case I would like respectfully to draw your attention to the appointment to a commission of a young German of this town called George Bollinger. His family is resident here and known through the whole of the country as the most openly disloyal and strongest partisans of Germany. A brother and sister went there to acquire professions and it is very recently the sister returned. In the early days of the war they made no secret of their belief that the Germans were destined to rule France, and indeed eventually the whole of Europe. The father, Mr Bollinger, is a German of the Germans and the mother is a disloyal Irishwoman. We mothers who have sons at the front feel that they should not be led by German officers bearing German names. When this young man left here as a private it was a great dread to us that he had gone for some treacherous purpose, perhaps to shoot our officers, but what he has done to earn a commission I do not know - perhaps you would suggest an inquiry.

MPs and the Women's Anti-German League started accusing George of being pro-German. The Army again stood by him, pointing out his promotion was for "exceptional gallantry and faithful conduct".

August 29 - 1916

Hon. J. Allan
Minister for Defence.

Dear Sir

In view of what happened at the front, Mr. German Deserter. I wish to draw your attention that Lieutenant Bollinger serving with the 16th Reinforcement is of German Descent.

The fact of his sister being in Germany at the out-break of war, and for six months after, and now back in New Plymouth. speaks for itself.

There may be no question as to his loyalty, but we are not in a position to take any risk.

Yours faithfully
A. Milne.

*B.S.S.
For despatch reply
Sept 7, 16*

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CENTRAL REGISTER

The Minister of Defence, James Allen, explained that Bollinger had been commissioned because of his 'exceptional gallantry and faithful conduct ... in the face of the enemy'.

To put the rumours to rest, Bollinger volunteered to return to active service - this time, to face the Germans on the Western Front.

On 13 May 1917, one month before his death he wrote following letter:

'Dear Algie,

Just a few lines from this beautiful spot. We are well away from the firing line and I feel a different man. The weather is beautiful and the country glorious. No part of New Zealand ever looked prettier. We are on our way out to train. I am living at a better class farm house with my platoon of fifty men. We are just like a big family and I can tell you I will be happy to lead this crowd of chaps over the bags.

I have already been detailed for the job. I thought I might have missed. I even hoped so. You know life is still worth living but I know the men want me to go with them. We have to work hard. The other night we got two buckets of beer and had a 'bonzer' concert in the barn.

The weather is awfully hot and we seem to be thirsty all the time.

I have a lovely room myself and a good billet and plenty of milk to drink and eggs and vegetables to eat. I am forgetting my nerves and they were pretty bad.

Just before we came out one of my company fellow Officers was killed and another wounded and I was the only Lieutenant left in the Company.

I can tell you Algie I had to work. One night I was coming down from the firing line about three miles this side of it when Fritz put a barrage with six-inch shells around us. Of course, he was searching for batteries.

You could never imagine the burst of a six-inch shell. They were dropping in fours and fives and one never knew when the next was going to drop.

We got through without a casualty but God forbid that we should ever go through the same again.

Excuse this short note Algie. The morning hours are already small. I am going.

Kind remembrances to our rainbow kiddies.

Yours

GW Bollinger.

7 June 1917, Messines, Zero hour was at ten minutes past three in the morning.

At that very moment, there was a muffled roar, that seemed to die down and then increase and die down again. Then there was a shake that rocked the very earth. Between the last roar of the mines exploding and the opening of the guns was no perceptible interval. The guns belched forth their concentrated fury. Never had the heavens looked so awe-inspiring as they did that morning.

The honor of capturing Messines itself was given to the New Zealand Division. The 2nd Wellingtons with George as Company Commander of the Hawke's Bay Company emerged from the new subsidiary line fifty-five minutes after zero hour. A few seconds wait to make sure everyone was there, and then up on to the road to the right down the Artillery track by the River Douve, then to the left and across country on the parapets of trenches to our new position.

A heavy smoke fog lay a few feet above the ground, and the unmistakable odor of lethal gas was everywhere. It was no use attempting to shout orders: the roar of artillery and machine-guns overwhelmed all other sounds: one could not even distinguish the explosion of our own shells from the shells of the enemy's barrage now falling close to us.

To the 2nd Battalion moving forward, there was ample evidence that the storming troops, while waiting their turn to advance, had not escaped altogether, for in one trench, lay the bodies of five men killed by a single shell, and close by an abandoned tank.

Early on the morning of the 8th June, the posts were established in the frontline, two posts on the right being taken off by two platoons from Hawkes Bay Company, with a third platoon in support, while two platoon. Enemy shelling was heavy during the afternoon and, as the positions were fully exposed to view, being on the forward slope of Messines Ridge, the relief was not easy to carry out. The Hawkes Bay Company was able to rush forward its Lewis Gun sections by daylight but during that operation, Lieutenant George Bollinger was severely wounded.

He died two days later at N°2 Australian Casualty Clearing Station and was buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension.



Max Bollinger, father to George and Herman, died in November 1917 of a broken heart ...



Herman, brother of George

Eight of Bollinger's cousins also died on the Western Front while fighting for Germany.

In Omata, a small settlement on the outskirts of New Plymouth where George and Herman were born, a war memorial sits out the front of the church.

"Lest we Forget," it is engraved, followed by the names of the local lads who died in the Great War.

Omata's sons, the Bollinger boys, don't get a mention but both are remembered on the New Plymouth Boys High School War Memorial where they went to school.



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Volgende evocaties / Following evocations

September / October 2023: Gwalia Cemetery – Poperinge
Mei / May 2024: Zandvoorde
Augustus / August 2024: De Palingbeek - Zillebeke

Meer informatie / More information:

www.lastpost.be