



Issue #3 November 2009

Arras Commemoration



After the March 2009 Tunnelling Company descendants' gathering Hauraki District Mayor John Tregidga undertook to visit Arras on their behalf. While in Arras he participated in an especially arranged wreath laying ceremony at the New Zealand Tunnellers' Monument to honour the men from the Hauraki District, as well as others who served in the New Zealand Tunnelling Company. Their specialist underground mining work involved developing a large system of connected underground galleries beneath the city of Arras, which were used in the 1917 Battle of Arras. The New Zealand Vice Chief of Defence Force, Rear Admiral Jack Steer wrote, 'This is a significant

event to remember the enormous contribution of the Tunnellers in World War One.' About 50 people attended the wreath laying ceremony, including overseas World War One researchers.

The RNZRSA provided a wreath for this occasion and also a RNZRSA plaque that was inscribed 'Presented to the Citizens of Arras by the Royal New Zealand Returned Services Association'.

The Mayor of Arras, Senator Jean-Marie Vanlerenberge, Squadron Leader Lyall J. Stewart of the New Zealand Defence Staff in London, and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) Colonel (Rtd.) Jeremy Towler, Royal British Legion also laid wreaths.

Other officials attending were Chris Hawes, Deputy Head of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, M. Yves Delrue Conseiller Municipal Delegeue aux Affaires Militaires et Patriotiques Arras, members of a Canadian Veteran Affairs Wreath Laying Party and Jean-Marie Prestaux, Director of the Carriere Wellington Museum.

Squadron Leader Stewart also represented the New Zealand Embassy in France at the ceremony. Sarah Dennis, New Zealand Ambassador to France said, 'We are delighted that the historic links between the tunnellers from the Hauraki Goldfields and the town of Arras are being highlighted in this way. The story of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company in Arras is a unique one and the Embassy is always pleased to support events that underline this special relationship with Arras'.

In his speech Squadron Leader Lyall Stewart acknowledged the work that the people of Arras and Waihi are doing to recognise the contribution Tunnelling Company men made to the war and to keep alive the stories that make up our shared histories.

A visit to nearby World War One cemeteries by Squadron Leader Stewart and Mayor Tregidga was also arranged. Poppies provided by the RNZRSA were laid on the graves of New Zealand Tunnelling Company men.

The Mayor was also able to visit the underground Carriere Wellington Museum in Arras, which features the New Zealand Tunneling Company. The names of New Zealand men and their drawings reminding them of home can still be seen on cave walls.

Hauraki District Mayor Tregidga reports that the visit to Arras was a great success, with prime time regional TV coverage as well as a full-page story in the region's main newspaper. Further strengthening of relationships between Arras and Waihi is expected to result from the visit.

A special mention must also be made of Anne Campbell Towler, Royal British Legion Bolougne and Pas de Calais Branch secretary. Anne provided much appreciated support when distance and language barriers at times made organising from afar difficult. You may have seen some of her photos of the wreath laying used in Waihi newspaper reports.

English World War One researcher and author Robert Pike also attended the Arras wreath laying ceremony and took the photos for this report. Many thanks to Bob for his assistance. Bob is the Hon. Editor of 'If You Want the Old Battalion' Essex WFA newsletter and author of 'The Victor Heroes' a book providing biographies of those appearing on the Saffron Walden, Essex, memorial, including a NZ enlistment.

Attending the ceremony with Bob were his family and friends. These included fellow members of the Western Front Association

(WFA), the Gallipoli Association as well as retired members of the military including officers in the REME.

Remembering those who did not return



Unlike most other small towns, Waihi and Paeroa do not have a war memorial recording names of local enlistments. The St John Anglican Church lych gate provides the only publicly available list of names in Waihi. None of these are Waihi Tunnelling Company men. As well, names of Waihi enlisted Tunnelling Company men who died during the war years are not listed on the Waihi RSA Roll of Honour.

Since the Arras wreath laying Bob Pike has worked with Waihi Heritage Vision to supply grave photos relating to Waihi and Hauraki Goldfields World War One enlistments. Over 70 photos of NZ Tunnelling Company graves and those of local servicemen in other units who died in France and Belgium during the First World War are now available thanks to his efforts.

Hauraki men who have no known grave are remembered on overseas memorials. Bob is also taking photographs of these. One of these is Lieutenant Allen Claude Cooper of the Auckland Infantry Battalion. Cooper's mother, Mrs Annie Agnew, was from Barry Road in Waihi. Cooper was 24 when he was killed in action. He was awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action. Cooper is also remembered on the Waihi RSA Roll of Honour.

The New Zealand Tunnelling Company

We have records of more than 60 men known to have died up to March 1919. 41 of those died during service in Arras. These 41 are the only men presently commemorated as a Tunnelling Company group, and only in France. We can provide information for anyone going overseas and wanting to locate NZ Tunnelling Company graves or names on memorial walls.

Nine Waihi/Karangahake members of the Tunnelling Company died up to March 1919, two are buried in the Waihi cemetery. A further two Waihi men died a short time after the war and their deaths are attributed to war service.

Only S. Dargan who died in 1920 and W. Worth who died the following year are listed on the Waihi RSA Roll of Honour. Waihi and Paeroa War Memorials do not list servicemen's names.

Among others, overseas grave and memorial photos are available for Hauraki Goldfields men:

Sergeant Claude Searle Pownceby, Sapper Colin Adams, Sapper Walter Patrick Tatham, Sapper George Everett Davis, Sapper Robert James Jones, Lance Corporal Frederick George McClymont, Sapper George Frederick Trenberth. Sapper Ernest Davies. E Davies is listed on the First World War Memorial in the town of Coromandel.

Kiwi Connections

A number of NZ Tunnelling Company men listed Australian next of kin. NZ miners working in Australia at the outbreak of war also chose to enlist in the Australian Tunnelling Companies. A number of NZ men would give next of kin from England. NZ Tunnelling Company Sapper Thomas (John) Ashford, aged 30, died 2nd July 1916 and is buried in Arras. He is remembered in Cornwall, on the Scilly Isles War Memorial. His brother Frederick served in a West Yorkshire Regiment and died in 1917.

Extract from the NZ Tunnelling Company Unit Diary:

2/7/16 Mining quiet except near J1.1. Sapper Ashford was killed outright at No.1. Billets this evening by the nose cap of an anti-aircraft shell.

3/7/16 Ashford was buried in Arras today. Mining quiet except near J1.1, where we have chambered and also loading J1.12 in case of emergency.

From Katikati, 46354 Private Bert Johnston embarked with the 3rd Battalion, Auckland Infantry Regiment and by October 1917, was in the frontline near Passchendaele. Bert was detached to help the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company build defensive works near Ypres on 18 Jan 1918. It was while working on these defences at Westhoek that he was shelled and lost an arm.

Lest We Forget

There have been suggestions that Waihi should erect a New Zealand Tunnelling Company Memorial. Preliminary discussions have been held with Eddie Morrow, CEO of Vision Waihi Trust. A donation of \$200 has been made to Waihi Heritage Vision to start the fund. Let us know your thoughts.

A Fortunate Company

The NZ Tunnelling Company was originally commanded by Major J. E. Duigan, N.Z.S.C., and later, on his accepting a Staff appointment, by Capt. (later Major) H. Vickerman.

Following the war Major H. Vickerman, DSO, OBE, wrote in the '*Register of Tunnelling Company Officers*'. February, 1925

Their cosmopolitan and rugged personnel, drawn from all the wilder parts of the British Empire, was the most conspicuous characteristic of the Tunnellers. Among them grew up a rivalry and a comradeship, born of mutual regard, whose Imperial importance cannot be over-estimated. Let those of us who survived preserve this comradeship, and mark events unique in engineering history. Though the old spirit of our forefathers still lives, it lies with our generation to cement the growing bonds of Empire. Who could say that on organisation extending the old Tunnelling Company spirit to the Empire's affairs would be an inconsiderable factor in the 'war of peace'.

From the same publication, Lt J. C. Neil N.Z. Tunnelling Coy., remarked in his history of the Company, published in 1922, ' . . . there we met contingents from all the Tunnelling Companies in the army area. The Tunnellers were men drawn from all corners of the Earth, and of the sort that makes for good fellowship'.

The issue of the Register commemorated the Tenth Anniversary of the formation of the four original Tunnelling Companies in France and Flanders. The case for establishing an Old Comrades' Association was discussed.

The case for establishing an association is strengthened by the considerations that (1) Tunnelling Companies were all disbanded after the Armistice, and are without even cadre representation in Peace Establishments (2) Tunnellers comprised the only special

branch of the fighting services drawn from all parts of the Empire, and formed into one composite force: and (3) in civil life, Tunnellers continue to be linked by common interest in the mining and engineering world.

The most important factor, however, is the strong desire of the majority of Tunnellers to keep in touch with their old comrades.

The 1922 NZ Tunnelling Company Official War Diary concludes *A fortunate Company, fortunate in its undertakings and fortunate in that its duty lay in conserving life rather than taking it.*

The Battle of Arras was a British offensive. Unlike Messines and Passchendaele the action which the New Zealand Tunnelling Company men played a part in has no place in the commemorative dates which mark significant events in New Zealand's military history, yet their contribution was significant.

The Wikipedia entry reads;

The Royal Engineers devised a plan to add new tunnels to this network so that troops could arrive at the battlefield in secrecy and in safety. The scale of this undertaking was enormous: in one sector alone four Tunnel Companies (of 500 men each) worked around the clock in 18-hour shifts for two months. Eventually, they constructed 20 kilometres of tunnels, graded as subways (foot traffic only); tramways (with rails for hand-drawn trollies, for taking ammunition to the line and bringing casualties back from it); and railways (a light railway system). Just before the assault the tunnel system had grown big enough to conceal 24,000 men, with electric lighting provided by its own small powerhouse, as well as kitchens, latrines, and a medical centre with a fully equipped operating theatre. The bulk of this work was done by New Zealanders, including Maori and Pacific Islanders from the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion.

Letter from a descendant

Colin Adams, Sapper NZ Tunnelling Company, was my mother's cousin. Mum's father John and Colin's father Duncan were brothers. Although I had researched my mother's genealogy many years ago, I did not know of Colin's existence until 2007 when a distant cousin told me that a relation had been killed in the First World War. Because Colin is the only person on my mother's side that had been a war victim, he was immediately of great interest to me and I began to research his history and the history of his Company. Then in 2009 I read about the gathering at Waihi commemorating the history of Colin's Company and was able to attend.

Colin and John both worked for the Talisman Gold Mining Company mining in the Waihi area. Unfortunately there is no photo of Colin available, however it was the next best thing to receive a photo of Colin's grave in France. Receiving this photo meant a great deal to me.

I am immensely proud of Colin. When I found out about Colin I had a son the same age as Colin was when he died in the war. My son is now 25 and he is enjoying his life. My boy looks very like my mother, and much I think what Colin may have looked like going by his description on his Military Enrolment sheet. When I think how Colin was denied his life it breaks my heart.

What an exciting Company Colin belonged to, and what great skills he must have had to do the work he did in France. All of Waihi is proud of him and the rest of the tunnellers as well.

James Gribble was the boss of the mining in Waihi. Colin's sister Flora married his son, James.

Desley Flack, 6 Nov 2009

According to Neill's *The New Zealand Tunnelling Company - 1915 - 1919* nineteen Drivers, including two with the rank of Corporal embarked with the New Zealand Tunnelling Company Main Body on December 18th 1915.

From Wikipedia; *A driver in WW1 rode on team horses which pulled wagons, guns, ambulances, equipment. Usually a wagon had a team of 6 horses, 3 pairs of 2. Each driver was responsible for his two horses (feeding, shoeing, vet care, etc.) and he teamed up with two other drivers to pull the wagon. Drivers were usually privates in rank, but designated "Driver" to distinguish them from infantry. Drivers were essential in getting supplies, food, ammunition and equipment to the men at the front, and bringing wounded back to medical stations. It was a dangerous job as they were targeted by machine guns and artillery to prevent them getting supplies through.*

5/893 Roy Jocelyn Grainger was one of those men who enlisted as a Driver in the Tunnelling Company. His son, Eric contacted us. After qualifying as engineer his father joined the Horahora Power Station and then the Meremere Power station where he was engaged in the installation of the High Tension Power lines to Waihi. Eric says, *I understand my father went to Arras with the Tunnelling Company after their training at Falmouth. In Arras, they had a major problem in establishing electric lighting in the many underground tunnels. When my father disclosed to his seniors his extensive expertise in Power Installation he was sent back to Aldershot in the UK, transferred to the Royal Engineers and given a Commission. As an officer he was sent back to Arras and took command of the unit they set up to install the extensive power distribution in the many*

mines and chalk tunnels. When the war was finished he was sent back to Aldershot where he had previously found his loved one, who he married in her hometown and returned to NZ via Capetown at the end of 1919.



Following his war service Roy brought home a British bride. His son Eric Grainger sent in the photo above showing his father, far right. It was taken in France and sent to his future wife, Dorothy, in the UK for a bit of fun.

5/888 Driver Daniel Joseph Furey served as a Sapper in the Samoa Expeditionary Force Railway Engineers before returning to NZ and re-enlisting and embarking from NZ with the Tunnelling Company Main Body. Sergeant Furey was discharged from the Codford Hospital in England in June 1919 and disembarked in NZ in September. His daughter Shirley tells us that her father was wounded in France rescuing his horse team from shrapnel fire, while later he also received his share of gas. Back in NZ Mr Furey returned to the Railway Dept before being transferred to the Ministry of Works. Shirley writes, *During the 1939-45 war, he was on loan to the American Works Dept. Later he was transferred to the Karapiro Hydro Works. When Maratai came into being, he went with Mr A.E. Clark, engineer, and opened up the administration offices. He also became the first Justice of the Peace in 1946 in the new town of Mangakino. Owing to ill health, Mr Furey retired to Coromandel in 1950. He died in 1964 and he was buried in the RSA block at Coromandel.*

37521 Sapper Bertram Martin

by Dick Martin

Bertram Martin, my father, was born 1882 at Amherst in the Victorian Goldfields. His Father was a butcher, whose wife died and left him with nine siblings. He remarried and Dad clashed with his Stepmother and at seventeen he left home, never to return, for the Kalgoorlie goldfields.

Whilst there he was involved with the disaster at Marvel Loch mine where many miners were trapped for a week by a fall before they were rescued.

After Kalgoorlie he and a mate decided to make for the Klondike in Alaska. They got as far as Auckland when the mate changed his mind. Rather than proceed on his own, Dad decided to stay in NZ. He got a job at Makatote on the main trunk line to Wellington. Interestingly their intended ship the Manuka was overwhelmed by an earthquake driven tidal wave in San Francisco Harbour with heavy loss of life ... (Fate) He made one trip back to Australia to see Jack Johnson and Tommy Burns fight for the world heavyweight title at Rushcutters Sydney.

He met my mother Alice Thornton on the day the American Navy Great White Fleet arrived in Auckland on its world voyage. After a short courtship she joined him on the Main Trunk job. When the line was finished he was posted to Tahora on the Stratford Ohakura railway construction. In 1916, with two little girls, he was due to be called up, so he with several other PWD men enlisted in the Tunnelling Company.

He was at Avondale, Narrow Neck and finally Featherston before embarking on the SS Manganui for the UK.

My eldest sister Rosalie told of her and our mother travelling in the train from New Plymouth to Stratford with him on his final

leave and Mother sitting in the park waiting for the return train, crying.

UK. Sling camp Salisbury Plain. Shocking place. Kiwi carved in the chalk hill can be seen today still.

Train to embarkation stopped at a country station ... an inviting pub across the double train lines. New Zealanders used to slow chuff chuffs were caught on the line by an express doing eighty miles an hour, seven or eight killed...not sure if they were tunnellers.

Arras. Arrived in caves. Tommies using matches to de-louse themselves and clothes. 'You poor bastards', some Kiwi said. Next thing it was all on! Until someone yelled, 'Hey, that's a term of endearment where we come from'.

Was posted to a crossroads under heavy shellfire filling in craters so transport could move. A shell burst above them and a guy next to him got a piece of shrapnel that hit him on his helmet, punctured it and came out of his backside. If you weren't shit scared of shelling; you're a bloody liar or you were never there! (Bert Martin)

Short handled shovel better to fight underground with than the bayonet.

Highlight: Broke into an underground wine cellar stayed there for a week.

Built a bridge over a large canal (forerunner of the Bailey) in record time.

C. In C . Came up on horseback with flags flying and his entourage. Tapped the Captain on the shoulder with his crop and said, 'Good boy New Zealand!' Next day he was decorated.

1919, he returned to NZ. Ten pounds or keep your great-coat, and that was WW1 (They had not heard of counsellors in those days)

Back with PWD on Te-Roti Opunake spur line. Back to Tangarakau on the Stratford Ohakakura line.

Most of the NZ Tun Coy Men were Ex PWD (later Works Department) tunnellers and after the war they stuck together in the Public Works Department from the Engineer in Chief down to the most humble worker. Frank Langbein...Bert Annand...are two who come to mind who rose very high in the department.

1934 - 1936 Stratford supervising relief workers on the Stratford Aerodrome and various created jobs for the unemployed in a twenty-mile radius. All these visited by bicycle.

1937 Depression begins to abate. Fordell tunnels and rail deviation. Promoted overseer.

1941 Fordell completed. Transferred to South Island main trunk at Clarence Bridge. Due to retire in a year so Mother settles in Eltham

1942 Fortifications in the Marlborough Sounds. Retirement delayed by war. In 1942 he was advised that his eldest son George aged 22 was shot down and killed over Germany in a RAF Stirling bomber. True to his manner he quietly asked for some annual leave early to travel to Eltham to comfort his wife. However someone advised the Engineer in Chief so that when he got off the ferry at Wellington he was told he was on special indefinite leave and a Government car was waiting to take him up to Eltham! Of course it was mere coincidence that the Chief was his Captain in Arras!

1943 Finished guns in the sounds. They only fired one shot each.

1944 - 45 Maintenance boss at Trentham Military camp.

Dad retired in 1946 as an Inspector of Works, after 44 years with the Department. (As high as a man could go without academic qualifications.) He was honoured by a

farewell at head office hosted by Bob Semple, the Minister of Works. The next day he was given the honour again of setting and firing the first shot (dynamite charge) for the Rimutaka Railway Tunnel.

Retired to Eltham. Involved with building Old Folks Hall and clubrooms, RSA and Masonic Lodge (ever since his mining days)

1955 met his reward and was buried at the Eltham soldier's cemetery.

Additional info:

You mentioned and asked how people and my family regarded Labour. Michael Joseph Savage was Labour and Labour was Michael Joseph Savage. He was God to many, especially at Christmas 1936 when every unemployed person got five pounds.

When he died in 1939, as a twelve year old I was taken with my family and hundreds of others to Marton Junction to see his funeral train which had an open sided mortuary van filled to the brim with flowers, to which we added.

It was said that as the train made its way from Wellington to Auckland even farmers bowed to it as it passed. People were genuinely crying.

There were better politicians that followed him but none ever had the aura of Mickey Savage. Does that answer why his photo graced most homes and all public bars and clubs where men gathered right up until the fifties.

All was not peaches and cream with the Red Feds. They had their internal wars and that caused dramatic splits in the Labour movement. I think what saved them was the misery of the Depression and folks' attitude, that anything must be better than this. Dad admired John A Lee because even though he was anti war, he had done his bit in 1914 -18. Peter Fraser was the hatchet man who chopped Lee and his supporters, even to having 1ZM jammed. The Reds emerged victorious and helped by the world economic situation improving and Adolph Hitler rattling his sword, they were unassailable for several years.

Thanks

Thanks to RNZRSA, the New Zealand Defence Force and Arras Tourism Office for their invaluable help with the Arras commemoration.

Thanks also to Newmont Waihi Gold for their assistance in getting the RNZRSA wreath, poppies and plaque to Arras, and for ongoing photocopying for *Despatches* as well as the Armistice Day photography display held in Waihi.

Thanks also to Hauraki District Council and Mayor John Tregidga for continued support.

Special thanks to Barrie Walmsley for his skills in mounting a piece of Favona underground mine ore onto old Martha Mine timber. This special piece will eventually find its way to Arras. Barrie's Uncle, Lieutenant Stewart Walmsley, was in the Tunnelling Company 6th Reinforcements.

