

# Archie MORGAN

2nd Battalion 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade

Western Front 1916-1917

World War 1

Killed in Action



*Be than faithful unto death*

In Loving Memory  
OF  
**A. J. MORGAN,**  
Lance-Sergt. 13th Reinforcements, New Zealand Forces.  
Killed in action in France, September 28th, 1917.  
Aged 30 years. Deeply Mourned.

Amongst the first when war outburst,  
To obey his country's call;  
Joined in the strife, he gave his life  
On the Battlefields of Gaul.

His day had come, his duty done,  
He paid full penalty;  
He stood the test, he did his best  
For Peace and Liberty.

He won his goal, God rest his soul,  
Freed from all worldly pain;  
To memory dear, with conscience clear,  
We'll meet our son again.  
—Father.



## MORGAN, Archibald John

23082 Lance Sergeant A J MORGAN, 2nd Battalion 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade, was killed in action on 28 September 1917 in Ypres, Belgium, aged 30 years.



Archibald John (Archie) MORGAN was born in Turakina on 7 November 1887. The son of John Charles MORGAN and Janet Agnes CAMERON, he had one sibling, a younger sister Kereina Mary (Krina). In 1905 the family moved to 'Airlie', a block of land his parents purchased at Mangamahu<sup>1</sup> - a hill-country farming settlement in the middle reaches of the Whangaehu Valley.

His father, John Charles MORGAN, was younger brother of our great-grandmother, Charlotte Mary MORGAN, and cousin to our grandfather Edgar Charles Morgan. Archie is first cousin (2x removed) to our generation.

As a youngster, Archie attended the Turakina Public School and later became a student at Mangamahu School. From there he attended to St. Patrick's College in Wellington where he completed his education. It was about this time he suffered a bout of Rheumatic fever at age 14 years [as noted on his Attestation form medical examination].

After leaving school, farming pursuits were followed. Archie purchased land and established a farm 'Aukopae' at Otunui<sup>2</sup> (Taumarunui) which he worked in conjunction with his parent's farm at Mangamahu. He was a keen athlete and was for many years a valued member of the Taumarunui Football Club. His name also features in the lists of members of the Taumarunui Chamber of Commerce.

The John Charles and Janet Agnes MORGAN line of family died out with the death of Krina in 1964. After the death of Archie, Krina was a spinster until she married William James FEENEY in 1948 at the age of 56. Krina and William had no children.



(L) Archie and Krina, c.1916. (R) The homestead at Mangamahu 'Airlie' c.1905. John, Janet and Krina with dogs Bess and Grey.

<sup>1</sup> John, a blacksmith and had opened up a business in Mangamahu.

<sup>2</sup> Otunui district had only recently been opened for settlement c.1910 and was expected to be an important farming centre in the area. Archie was also one of the first selectors of national endowment land here.

## Enlistment

Archie was 28 years old when he enlisted on 10 January 1916 at Trentham, Upper Hutt in Wellington and posted to the New Zealand Rifle Brigade.

Archie was living in Otunui working as a farmer when he enlisted. He was 5'9" tall (175cm), 146lbs (66kg) in weight with grey eyes and brown hair. He was immediately posted to Trentham Camp in Wellington, 4 Reserve Company with the rank of private, service number 23082.

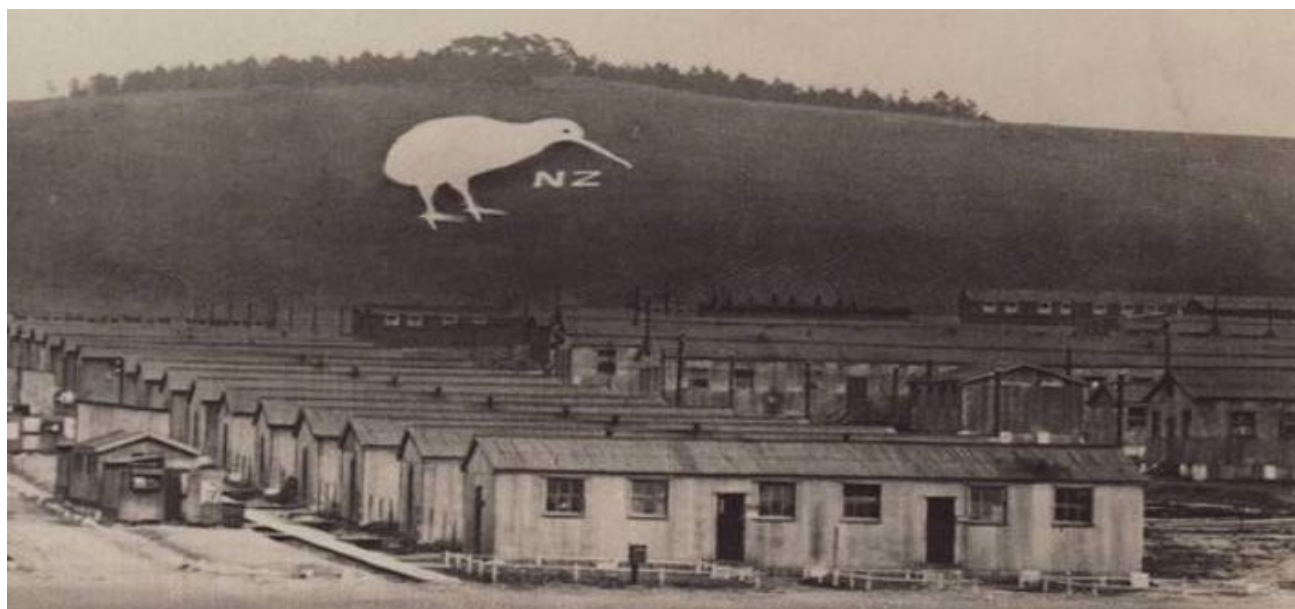
At Trentham, new recruits were put through a 16-week infantry-training programme. His training included physical fitness, musketry, bayonet-fighting, individual training, and night training. At the end of February Archie was promoted to lance corporal.

Training completed, he then embarked from Wellington on 29 May 1916 aboard *HMNZT 54 Willochra* as part of the 13th Reinforcements of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade. The *Willochra* travelled in convoy with *HMNZT 56 Tofua*. The two ships, carrying a total of 2,123 troops, travelled via Albany, Australia, and the Cape of Good Hope - bound for England.

Archie disembarked in Devonport, England on 26 July 1916 and immediately 'attached in strength' to the 5th (Reserve) Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade and posted to Sling Camp. 'Sling' is located at Bulford, Wiltshire on the Salisbury Plains. It was officially called the 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade Reserve Camp and was the main training camp and staging area for New Zealand soldiers before being sent to the trenches of Europe.

At Sling Archie commenced a course of training which varied according to the urgency of the demand from France. A full course was 30 days long where route marches, endless drills and limited rations were the order of the day. The troops were not fond of Sling during the war, and they came to heartily loathe the place afterwards.

On 26 September 1916 Archie assembled and marched out for France with the 4th Reinforcements as a reinforcement to 'C' Company, 2nd Battalion 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade.



Sling Camp showing the famous 'Bulford Kiwi' carved in the chalk on Beacon Hill. The giant 'Kiwi' was created in 1919 by soldiers of the NZEF who were awaiting repatriation following the end of the war.

## France & Belgium

On arrival in France on 27 September 1916 Archie was attached to No.27 New Zealand Infantry Base Depot at Étaples.

All New Zealand troops on their way to the front lines in France and Belgium went through a short, intensive training course at the New Zealand General Base Depot in Étaples<sup>3</sup> - the largest British and British Imperial Forces training camp in France. The training and discipline was severe, and Étaples was even more loathed than Sling. Archie arrived a few weeks after the infamous mutiny that took place here.

Training complete, Archie was posted as reinforcement to 'C' Company, 2nd Battalion 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade on 22 November 1916. Joining the Brigade at billets in the villages of Fleurbaix and Bac St. Maur (Boutillerie Sector). Archie had missed the wasteful death and devastation of the Somme Offensive in which by the time it ended on 18 November 1916, 1.2 million men had died.<sup>4</sup>

At this time his Battalion spent intermittent time manning the front lines and was involved in a number of skirmishes, raids, and contacts with the enemy. During the afternoon of 23 December 1916, the 1st and 2nd Battalions relieved the 3rd and 4th in the front line. This meant Archie spent Christmas Day in the trenches on the front line.

*'Throughout Christmas Day, to disabuse the mind of the enemy as to the possibility of any fraternization, our artillery carried out an intermittent but very heavy bombardment of the German lines, culminating in a "dummy raid" at 8.35 p.m. The enemy's retaliation was only slight.'*

It was now the depth of the severest winter known in this region for thirty years. Snowstorms were frequent and the cold intense. On 24 January 1917 the 3rd Brigade relieved the 2nd Brigade in the line in the Cordonnerie Sector, east of Laventie. The next day Archie was appointed to the rank of Lance Corporal.

By late February they had moved Ploegsteert Sector, about four miles north of Armentieres. Throughout their time here, the enemy made increasing use of gas-shells, heavy trench mortars, and aerial bombardment. Archie was admitted to hospital (No. 3 NZ Field Ambulance) on 5 March 1917 with Tinnitus (ringing noises in ears). A condition that is not medically serious, he rejoined his unit on 23 March 1917.

Early April 1917 was almost entirely devoted to strenuous training in the trench-to-trench attack and in open warfare fighting. By 20 April 1917, they were back in the vicinity of Messines. During the next six days the Brigade supplied working parties for cable-burying, roadmaking, and the construction of trenches and gun pits.

In preparation for the battle of Messines, a scouting mission into the enemy trenches by the 2nd Battalion was undertaken to investigate a possible enemy strong point at La Plus Douve Farm, possibly including Archie.



*A fighting-patrol of fifteen men went out on the night of 18/19 May 1917, including Lance-Corporal Ernest Ellis Islip MM<sup>5</sup> (pictured), a scout of outstanding ability. While in the act of clearing a German concrete dug out, a thrown bomb [hand grenade] was picked up by a wounded German, who staggered out of the doorway with it. Here he fell at the feet of the men, and the bomb exploding killed the German and Lance-Corporal Islip.*

<sup>3</sup> A British and British Imperial Forces training camp next to the fishing port of Étaples on the northern French coast, just south of Boulogne – made infamous for a mutiny on 9 September 1917. This army city was a brutal, hated place of route marches in the sand dunes, exposure to chlorine gas and endless bayonet drills. The mutiny involved 1,000 soldiers including New Zealand and Australian personnel.

<sup>4</sup> The NZ Division entered the battle mid-September and by its end had suffered 6,000 wounded and 2,000 killed – many of those have no known grave.

<sup>5</sup> Islip was awarded the Military Medal (MM) on 3 February 1917 for his exploits before and during a raid on 7 January 1917, south of Fleurbaix. A party from the 2nd Battalion (Archie's Battalion and numbering 80 men) executed an extremely successful raid on the "Lozenge," a rectangular set of trench works just behind the enemy front line. It is possible that Archie participated in this raid.

On the same day (19 May 1917) Archie was promoted Corporal to replace Corporal Islip who had been killed in action.

The New Zealand Division took part in the capture of the Messines Ridge between 7-9 June 1917, a successful but costly battle. The New Zealanders captured the village of Messines without difficulty, but later suffered heavily from German bombardment, with more than 700 dying during the operation.

The attack was a striking success, heralded by the awe-inspiring thunder of the mine explosions. The New Zealand units in the vanguard, two battalions each of 2nd and 3rd (Rifle) Brigades, were soon in the ruins of Messines, mopping up dazed and demoralised Germans.

On 4 August 1917, the 2nd Battalion moved to Red Lodge, Hill 63, as support battalion. The weather was wet, and cold, and front-line trenches were for the most part thigh-deep in mud, devoid of duckboards, and quite without shelter. Such was the condition of the weather and the state of the trenches that the sick rate rose to 26 per cent. Artillery and aerial activity were intense, as well as ever-present danger from enemy sniper fire.



Messines Ridge. The artillery bombardment preceding the attack was so successful that the charge on the village appears orderly.

## Killed in Action

Archie was killed in action near Ypres on 28 September 1917 aged 29 years. He is buried in Ridge Wood Military Cemetery, Heuvelland, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium.

Not much is known of the circumstances surrounding Archie's death. Context is provided on the activities of the New Zealand Division and the 2nd Battalion 3rd Rifle Brigade during September 1917.

On 20 September 1917, the Second Army had ended the hiatus in Third Ypres and attacked the Menin Road ridge. English divisions captured Zonnebeke and pushed out towards the Gravenstafel Spur, clearing numerous strong points north and south of the road. The New Zealand Division was called forward and committed into the front line in stages.



The Passchendaele Battlefield – 1917.

At the beginning of September Archie had moved to the vicinity of Zillebeke, south-east of Ypres, going under canvas [tent] at Ridgewood Camp<sup>6</sup> near Diekebusch Lake. There, his Battalion was continuously employed at the trying and wearing work of cable burying. This entailed long marches over difficult shell-hole country and working steadily through a series of high-explosive and gas bombardments.

This was distasteful work, and in many respects, more dangerous and less welcome than being in the front-line trenches. Because of targeted shellfire, the work had to be done at night under cover of darkness and by month's end, 200 casualties had been sustained. The weather became bitterly cold, and as the men had neither blankets nor warm underclothing, they got little sleep.

Archie was appointed Lance Sergeant on 7 September 1917. Throughout this period the men slaved at their tasks, and now they were almost worn out and certainly unready for immediate combative action. By 28 September 1917, the 2nd Brigade was called into the old German front line at Wieltje. Archie's brigade (3rd Brigade) was still engaged in burying cables, and it was at this time he was killed.

It is plausible that Archie was killed by an artillery shell. We know he was in the vicinity not far from the cemetery where he is buried; the nature of the work he was doing was dangerous and subject to constant artillery fire; Archie is buried in a military cemetery with only two other New Zealanders (who died at separate times over a 3-week period) which in itself suggests he died in a random event.

Archie was listed in the New Zealand World War 1 Army Casualty Lists<sup>7</sup> as 'killed in action', as opposed to 'died from wounds', or 'died from disease' (sometimes referred to as 'wastage'). It is equally plausible that he died of pneumonia at Ridgewood Camp due to the cold weather conditions. The weather had been very cold; Archie had been admitted to the Field Hospital "sick" on 21 September 1917 and returned to his unit two days later.

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<sup>6</sup> Ridgewood Camp in the Dickebusch district. This camp was formed of low huts, having duckboard paths, it was situated in a small wood having some old trenches running through it. Also used by Australian forces.

<sup>7</sup> Book 10: 15 August 1917 – 14 November 1917, p.1205.

## Ridge Wood Military Cemetery

Ridge Wood Military Cemetery is located at Voormezele, West Flanders, Belgium, in the Ypres Salient of the Western Front.



Ridge Wood was the name given to a wood standing on high ground between the Kemmel road and Dickebusch Lake. The cemetery lies in a hollow on the western side of the ridge and the position was chosen for a front-line cemetery as early as May 1915.

The cemetery grounds were assigned to the United Kingdom in perpetuity by King Albert I of Belgium in recognition of the sacrifices made by the British Empire in the defence and liberation of Belgium during the war.

Ridge Wood Military Cemetery contains 619 Commonwealth burials of the First World War. Of these 292 are from Canada, 280 from the United Kingdom, 44 from Australia, and three from New Zealand. Of note is the cemetery's name – it is mis-spelt on the entrance gate. It should read as Ridge Wood.



Archie died a few weeks short of his 30th birthday. He is interred in a marked grave III.Q.7. At the time of Archie's death, he was billeted at Ridgewood Camp which is located near Diekebusch Lake.



Archie is buried here with two other two New Zealanders: Sergeant Donald McKenzie (24/525 - 3 NZRB 2nd Bn., III.R.4) who died on 9 September 1917; and Lance Corporal John Richard Warden (26/329 - 3 NZRB 4th Bn., III.E.7) who died on 11 September 1917.

### Archie is also memorialised in New Zealand.

His name appears on the Wayside Cross in Taumarunui<sup>8</sup> (pictured) which memorialises those killed in the First World War from Taumarunui and surrounding districts. There are 125 names listed on this monument.

<sup>8</sup> Wayside Cross, Morero Terrace, Taumarunui, King Country.

## References

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