

ALBERT CHARLES JENNINGS

(9 September 1879 – 7 June 1917)

Additional information supplied by Cheryl Carnahan

Boer War

The Colonist of 21 February 1901 reported

The whole of the men volunteering for the Seventh Contingent will be assembled in Nelson. Medical, riding and shooting tests will take place there. The men will go under canvas, and be rationed, the best local arrangements being made. While in camp elementary drill and shooting will be proceeded with.

The Colonist of 23 February 1901 reported

For the 11 places to be filled in the Nelson and Golden Bay districts, Captain Wolfe has received 26 applications, and the list is now closed.

Of this number 16 have been examined for medical fitness and measurement, but only 6 have passed the required the tests, want of stature being the stumbling block to most.

The 6 men who have been provisionally accepted are Messrs A.C.JenningsThese men will go into camp for instruction at 11 o'clock today, a district order to that effect appearing in this issue. The firing and riding tests are yet to be undergone.

The Colonist of 4th March 1901 reported

Farewelling the Nelson Section. The Nelson and West Coast divisions of the Nelson Volunteer District section of the Seventh Contingent have made very good progress in their drill and training while in camp in the Botanical Reserve, and as the men are of a very good stamp, and very even in build and height, they present a very good appearance in every day clothes. The general opinion of the district, and maintain the reputation of the New Zealanders at the front. The full list is as follows:- A.Jennings (a brother of Trooper Jennings, of the Second Contingent, who was killed),....all of Nelson.

A week later The Colonist of 11 March 1901 reported

The Seventh Contingent. This morning at 11 o'clock Nelson's further quota for the Seventh Contingent will leave by the Wainui for Wellington. It was originally intended that the Nelson portion should number 7 men, but it appears that out of 15 applicants, only 5 including Trumpeter Jackson, of the H Battery, who proceeded to Wellington last week, have been selected, the other men having failed to pass the various tests.

The Seventh N.Z. Contingent: Embarkation at Wellington

The fifth troopship to leave Wellington for Capetown received her complement of men this afternoon, when members of the Seventh Contingent embarked on board the s.s. Gulf of Taranto. Two or three thousand persons gathered on Jervois Quay, where the transport was berthed. When the Contingent arrived at the Quay they were addressed by the Mayor, the Governor, and the Premier. The men then marched aboard the transport, which cast off from the wharf amidst hearty cheers, and the vessel steamed right out to sea.

The ship chartered to transport the 7th Contingent to South Africa was too small, so that conditions on board were very crowded. There were over 594 men in the 7th NZ Contingent and unlike all the other contingents no horses could be taken. On 6 April 1901 they sailed on SS "Gulf of Taranto" for Cape Town arriving at East London on 13 March 1901. The unit disembarked at Durban on 10th May 1901 and were eventually ready for action from May 1901.

The contingent was reinforced by the arrival of experienced officers and men, issued with horses and equipment and sent by train to Standerton in eastern Transvaal,.

On 22nd May 1901 the Contingent had its first clash with the enemy during a sweep through an area of the southern Transvaal. Within a few days the contingent, which was to suffer more combat casualties than any other NZ unit in the war, had lost four men in action.

The 7th contingent were involved in action at Reitfontein on 14 June 1901, and Meyerton near Vereeniging on 2 September 1901.

Sinking of the "Marquette"

On 19th October Bert embarked on SS 'Marquette' after service injury and recovery from the Gallipoli Campaign. The H.M. Transport S.S. Marquette left Alexandria Harbour, Egypt in the late afternoon on October 19 1915 for Salonika, Greece. A rousing send off with cheers and songs by British and French sailors manning warships in port was interrupted by a fault in the steering gear which caused the Marquette to suddenly swing round. A fire in a case on the deck caused a further diversion until it was thrown overboard. At dusk the transport was joined by its escort and the portholes were blacked out. The passengers and crew carried out lifeboat drills, as there were rumours there was German U-boats in the area.

On the evening of the fourth day the escort, the French destroyer "Tirailleur", left the convey. At 0915 the next morning, 23 October when about 50 miles from Salonika, Capt. Dave N. Isaacs NZMC (the Quatermaster) was out strolling on deck with several nurses and drew their attention to a "straight thin green line about 50 yards away streaking through the water towards the ship", a periscope was seen cutting the water, and a terrific explosion on the forward starboard side signalled the ship had been struck by a torpedo. The vessel was struck in the forward part and the explosion

blew out both sides. It wrecked the quarters of the NZ and killed some and others were drowned between decks. There were 500 or more English soldiers of the ammunition division aboard and 500 to 600 mules and horses as well. Bert had to take to the sea, being 7 hours in the water supported by a biscuit tin and a board before being picked up by the French navy. At once the steamer *Marquette* began to list to port, but righted herself and then began to sink by the bow. Someone talked. Both in Cairo and Salonica the news that the *Marquette* had been struck was released some hours before the happening took place. She sank in thirteen minutes with a heavy loss of life - 128 troops including (17 NZMC staff), 10 nurses and 29 crewmen. Total loss 167. She had onboard 14 lifeboats and 35 rafts - combine carrying capacity 1196. Rafts and lifebuoys were thrown overboard. No aeroplanes went to search, even though the Greeks who were not fighting had knowledge that the ship had been torpedoed down the Gulf of Salonica just in the entrance to the inner bay of Saloniki near the river of Axios. Why did the escort leave her? Maybe because she was practically in the harbour. She was due into port by midday on the 23rd.

Letters (courtesy of Denis Skilton of Tauranga)

Written during the Sari Bair Offensive: August 1915. To his sister Gladys Jennings of Nelson:

29 October 1915. Dear Gladys,

Not much news on a post card I know, so I'll send you a few lines and chance the censor. I hope he is a nice chap or you wont make much of the yarn.

After being wounded in the foot in the fight at Sari Bair on Aug 9th 1915 I was sent to hospital in Pont de Koubbeh near Cairo. When I left hospital I had a good look round and quite enjoyed myself. Being still weak in the foot I was marked for "line of communication" and sent to NZ No.1 Stationary hospital for duty. At Port Said we packed up everything and embarked from Alexandria for Salonica by the "Marquette".

On the sinking of the *Marquette*:

I was on the promenade deck at the time and I went down forward to help and then took the last raft from there and jumped off the rail which was awash. The vessel was listed to one side and sinking by the bow. Some of the boats were launched but one or two tipped over and some of the nurses were thrown into the water and were crushed by another boat coming on top of them. I left the vessel 7 minutes after she was struck and as my raft was completely swamped I swam away and caught a hatch cover and swam about with it all day. 7 minutes after I left the vessel she reared the stern very high in the air and then dived out of sight. One mule and one horse came to the surface and swam about for

awhile. The majority of men and nurses, there were 36 nurses on board, were swimming or hanging onto rafts or wreckage. The water was not very cold, but quite cold enough to make one very stiff and exhausted after several hours in the briny. I saw several chaps drown near me. I was riding a hatch cover about 2 feet wide and 6 foot long. It was quite under water but it helped me to rest and I had a tin can, water-tight, under one arm so I held out all right, but when I was finally taken into a rescue boat I was so stiff I could not move one leg at all. The people were scattered over about 2 miles of water, you could see little groups on rafts and heads of the men in the water all over the place. Three small vessels came to rescue us, but I was 7 hours in the water and I was glad to get out of it I can assure you. We were taken to Salonica and put on a hospital ship where we rested for a few days and now we are on shore and I suppose we will start some sort of a hospital as soon as we get more equipment. Of course we lost everything we privately possessed but don't send anything out, mail is so uncertain. I have received very little so far. I am still a bit sore and a little off colour but I'll be right very soon. It is very wet here and the place is very muddy. A Merrie Xmas and Happy New Year to you all. Salonica is a small town, narrow streets, sidewalks average 3 to 4 foot wide occupied by Greeks and full of Greek soldiers.

Bert spent some months recovering from injuries in hospital in England. Below is a copy of his last letters.

*6 June 1917
somewhere at the front
Dear Gladys,
Just a line of cheerio. We are going in to a big battle and I guess things will be pretty wild. There will be some fight for sure. I will have to trust my usual luck to get through it. God's will be done, So don't fret if I go "West" I'm not worrying at all. So Good bye dear sister,
with love from Bert.*

(A hasty note – he was killed the next day at Messines).

*Somewhere at the Front
June 6th 1917
Dear Harriet
Just a line to tell you that I am thinking of you all at home. I am just going into a big battle so I may not be able to get home again. But this is a soldiers chance and I must take it with the rest of the boys. Give my love to all at home and I hope you are all well.
Love from Bert.*

Messines Memorial.

The NZ Division is commemorated at Messines by a Battle Exploit Memorial, erected to bear witness to its share in the Battle of Messines, and by another intended more particularly to record the names of its dead whose graves are not known.

The Battle Exploit Memorial, erected by the NZ Government, is a white stone obelisk surrounded by a small terrace and garden. It stands a short distance south-west of the village, on the road to Ploegsteert. It was unveiled by the King of the Belgians on 1st August 1924.

The 2nd Memorial, which is the subject of this Register, is immediately within the entrance of Messines Ridge British Cemetery, a little farther North. It was erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission. It consists of a circular rubble wall, 5 ft. 8 inches high, built around a mound, on which the Great Cross is erected. It is approached by a paved path and steps, at the top of which is a covered seat. The 840 names of the NZ Expeditionary Force are recorded on Portland stone panels let into a circular wall, and on the back of the sheltered seat is the dedicatory inscription:-

Here are recorded the names of Officers and Men of New Zealand
who fell in or near Messines in 1917

The Register of the Messines Ridge [NZ] memorial records
particulars of 840 New Zealand dead. The Register records -

JENNINGS, Sergeant Albert Charles, 6/1887 2nd Canterbury
Regiment. Killed in action 7 June 1917, age 37. Son of James and
Susan Jennings of Weka Street Nelson. Served in the South African
campaign.

The memorial commemorates the capture of Messines by the New Zealand Division on the 7th June, 1917, and is situated on high ground on the outskirts of the town. The site is an excellent one, overlooking the battlefield and the whole of the country which had been held for weeks before the attack. It is only about 100 yards from the Au Bon Fermier Cabaret, known to all New Zealanders as a place of heavy fighting.

The following inscription, in English, French, and Flemish, appears on the memorial:

"In honour of the men of the New Zealand Division.

The Battle of Messines

7th to 14th of June 1917.

**The New Zealand Division, on 7th June, 1917, captured this ridge
and advanced 2,000 yards through Messines to their objective on
the eastern side".**

The Nelson Evening Mail said –

*Mrs. J Jennings of Weka Street has been advised that her son
Platoon Sergeant A C Jennings, reported wounded in action for
the third time, is now believed to have been killed in action. The
late Segt Jennings has seen a good deal of active service, both in*

Gallipoli and France. In World War I he was wounded at Gallipoli.

THE LATE SERGT JENNINGS

The appended lines were written by the late Sergt A C Jennings on 27th last and forwarded to his parents Mr. and Mrs. J Jennings of Weka Street. Sergt Jennings was educated at the Boys Central School, and was a great lover of nature, his study of New Zealand ferns making him acquainted with all the bush-clad country near town.

For some years, he worked in the Ronga Valley in connection with Brownlee's sawmill, and afterwards took up bush section with a partner in Karamea, which he relinquished in order to serve his King and country. He was one of the ablest exponents of boxing in the district and many young men owe their skill in the art to his able coaching.

Bert is also remembered on the ANZAC memorial in ANZAC Park Nelson.

The verses below show a gift of poetic sentiment and give expression to a fine spirit of patriotism: -

NEW ZEALAND

**Far away from the homeland, where the south seas are rolling,
In the vigour of youth lies the land of our love.
So grand and so beautiful, blessed with such bounty,
A heritage true from the God above.**

**With the fern-leaf as emblem, with the stars on our banner
The sign of the bright Southern Cross up above
Forever we'll hold you, God's blessing enfold you.
New Zealand, New Zealand, the land of our love.**

**When the war-cry is heard, we will answer it's calling
We are born of the bravest - our forefathers grand,
Entrusting this treasure to us for safe-keeping,
A trust we'll hold sacred for the pioneer band**

**And the forest-clad mountains, the fast rushing rivers,
The glorious lakes, the valleys, the plains,
Will for ever renew in our sons and our daughters,
True pride in their birth-land again and again.**

ACJ - Somewhere at the Front April 27th 1917.