

"Devona"
Duncan Street
Wanganui East

24 January 1917

Dear Mr Keen

I was very pleased to get your letter last week letting me know how my brother Albert was killed, it was indeed very kind of you to let me know, I often wondered how it happened, and if we should ever hear. It was a great shock to us all especially to my mother who is up in years I really don't think she will ever get properly over it. I have sent her your letter, I am sure you won't mind, and I believe she has already answered it. What a dreadful battle it must have been, such a lot of young fellows I know were killed about then. My husband having lost a brother five days before poor Albert was killed and he also lost a brother on the 8th August 1915 at Gallipoli. It is a terrible war and we don't know when it will end. Now that conscription is in force in New Zealand there are over 1000 conscripts in camp, there will soon be very few men left in this country and a very few are getting exempt, the second division that is married men are to be called up next Aug or Sep but I am hoping it is all over before then. Poor Albert he used to write us some very cheeky letters. I had a field card from him written the same day he was killed, he never forgot us, he used to talk about going to England when the war was over. I do hope you have better luck and when you come back to England we would both be very pleased if you would call and see us we would make you very welcome and perhaps you will be able to tell us a little more. I have been wondering what part of New Zealand you came from. There are some Keens in Hawera that know my husband's relations.

The weather has been very dry and hot lately, everything is getting burnt up but we can put up with that. I suppose where you are it is just the opposite, cold and rain. I often think of the poor soldiers and how they stand it all so well.

I will close thanking you very much for writing to me, also wishing you the best of luck from us both.

Yours sincerely,

O Harris

From: Facebook page of Unknown Warriors of the NZEF

The above letter was written to Kerry Mitchell's (nee Reeve) grandfather George Thorburn Keen 6/4077 from Timaru. He had witnessed the death of a comrade during the Somme Offensive. He had written a compassionate letter to the family of the man, and this is the reply to that. It has been a family keepsake, but Kerry wanted to know who the author was, and the people were that involved within the letter. The letter had been with some of her Grandfather's war memories, received by Kerry after the death of her mother Isa Winnifred Keen (married name Reeve). Thanks for sending the scan in Kerry, and also Allan Steel for your amazing investigative work.

The author of the letter was Olive Harris, nee Luty. Her brother that was killed in action was Albert Luty, 10241, a dairy farmer from Fielding. Both George and Albert were comrades in No 2 company New Zealand Machine Gun Corps, when Albert was killed in action on the 20th of September 1916. He has no known grave but is remembered on the Caterpillar Valley (New Zealand) memorial. Aged 30.

Olive's husband William David Harris, brothers, mentioned in the letter are Frank Adam Harris 10/372, killed in action on the fatal day of the 8th of August 1915, at Chunuk Bair and Charles Alfred Harris 23/1997 killed on the 16th of September 1916. Olive Harris died at Wanganui in 1977, aged 92, her husband David pre-deceased her on the 3rd of April 1963, also in Wanganui or should I say Whanganui.

If anybody has anything further relating to the correspondence that may have been written by George Thorburn Keen to Olive Luty, I would dearly love to see a copy of that. Contact Kerry Mitchell – kerrymitch30@hotmail.com I have had this letter in my possession since 1999 and often wondered who the soldier was, never believing I would ever know. My sincere thanks to the Facebook page of Unknown Warriors of the NZEF and Ian Davidson and Alan Steel who helped piece the answers together.

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PRIVATE

JAMES L.

JOHNSTON S. C.

JONES C. B.

KEIGHTLEY F.

KELLY C. W.

KELLY G. G.

KNYVETT E. C.

LEITH A. C.

LENNOX H.

LUTY A.

LYNCH W.