

Remembering the sacrifices of those with SC connections who served their country 100 years ago.

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Captain Leslie George O'CALLAGHAN, 24291

Leslie George O'Callaghan, born on 6 April 1879 at The Springs, Lincoln, was the second son of Arthur Pyne O'Callaghan and his second wife, Florence née Hindmarsh, of 16 Craigie St. His father, who was born in 1837 in Ireland and died in 1930, was a farmer and land valuer and served as a Member of Parliament. After attending several schools in the Christchurch area – Riccarton, Lincoln, Prebbleton and Harewood, Leslie entered Waimataitai in 1893 when the family moved to Timaru. From there he went out to work in 1894. His parents lived again in Timaru from about 1910 until 1928. Leslie George O'Callaghan and Julia Marie Stephanie Wheeler, of Hadlow, were married on 20 February 1905 at St Patrick's, Waimate. Their only child, Florence Marie Hindmarsh O'Callaghan, was born on 15 December 1905 at Waimate.

At the age of 20 years and 9 months, L. G. O'Callaghan enlisted for service in the South African War, for which he was drafted from the South Canterbury Mounted Rifles. At this time he was a clerk in Christchurch for a Timaru employer. His next-of-kin was his father, Arthur Pyne O'Callaghan, of Christchurch. His brother William Arthur O'Callaghan, to whom his pay was to be paid, was living in Auckland. Trooper L. G. O'Callaghan, 423, left with the Second Contingent. He joined the Provisional Transvaal Constabulary on 21 June 1900 and was discharged on 4 October 1900. The following May he arrived at Port Chalmers by the Tongariro. On 16 December 1901 he made application to New Zealand Defence Headquarters Office, for a Commission in the Eighth Contingent, for which he was well recommended. He was appointed a Lieutenant in this contingent, effective from 15 January 1902. Again, on 28 January 1902, at Addington, (aged 23 years 10 months) he enlisted for service in South Africa, arriving home this time on 1 August 1902 by the Britannic and transferring to the Mararoa to get to Lyttelton.

As a young man Leslie was very much involved in sports – cricket, football, athletics, cycling. In 1899 he was re-elected secretary of the Timaru Cricket Club. May 1898 saw him riding in the three mile roadster bicycle handicap, under the auspices of the South Canterbury Amateur Athletic Club. He led for about a mile before his brother overtook him and won easily. In 1908 he was found refereeing a football match between Zealandia and Taniwha at the Park (Waimate). In May 1915 L. G. O'Callaghan was making his mark in golf.

Leslie O'Callaghan embarked on a teaching career, taking up an appointment at Waimataitai School in 1896. After his return from the South African War, he started business as a land, estate and commission agent in Waimate. He was appointed secretary to the Studholme Saleyards Company. And he acted as an agent for other

services, e. g. cycles, insurance. He was licensed to sell by auction, and in June 1908 he made his debut at the Timaru skin sales, selling 700 skins "in good style". Early 1910 he was named as a provisional director of the newly formed South Canterbury Cold Storage and Produce Distributing Company. He was appointed to the South Canterbury Volunteers Reserve with the rank of lieutenant in 1908, and he was appointed a territorial officer (Senior Cadets) with the rank of captain in 1911. He resigned his commission in 1912. About 1912 his wife drew a ballot for a run at Sherwood Downs, which she named "Leslie Downs" (after her husband). Leslie then moved into farming.

In April 1916, Leslie O'Callaghan received notice that he had been accepted for service with the New Zealand Forces and was to report for duty at Trentham Camp on 2 May. He also sold his furniture and household effects. O'Callaghan's wife went to Trentham in August 1916, to stay until he left. She and their daughter then left for England. Leslie O'Callaghan, farmer of Sherwood Downs, had enlisted on 2 May 1916, naming his wife (of Timaru and afterwards of London) and his father (of Timaru) as next-of-kin.

In October the Eighteenths paraded to an impressive farewell in the Auckland domain. There in command was Captain L. G. O'Callaghan, who had been posted to C Company of the 18th Reinforcements. By November the mayor of Auckland had received a letter from Captain Leslie O'Callaghan (Officer Commanding the 18th Reinforcements), which read — "When passing the last point of dear little New Zealand, I tried to send you a message to the good people of Auckland from all the boys on board this transport, but those in charge of the shore station were apparently asleep and consequently we were disappointed. However, it is not too late to thank you all for the very kind treatment and the splendid reception accorded us during our short visit to your city. The warmth of Auckland's greetings will be remembered always." His father received word [from Captain O'Callaghan] in December (1916), that all on the transports conveying the 18ths were well.

At a welcome for returned soldiers hosted by the Timaru Hibernian Society at the Arcade Café on 1 October 1917, Sergeant Michael Sullivan remarked that that he had been wounded while standing one day close to Captain O'Callaghan. Never would he have contemplated that Captain O'Callaghan would fall just 11 days later. Leslie George O'Callaghan was killed in action at Bellevue Spur on 12 October 1917, that dark day at Passchendaele one year and one day after he left New Zealand aboard the Tofua. Mrs O'Callaghan was by this time engaged in nursing work in one of the English hospitals. It was reported that he was buried at Passchendaele Waterloo Farm. This was one of the dressing stations where the stretcher bearers endeavoured to bring in the wounded. He is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium, where the hundreds whose bodies were not recovered are honoured.

L. G. O'Callaghan had served on the Waimate Borough Council in about 1908. At the council's October meeting a vote of condolence was carried in silence. Sympathy with the relatives was expressed also at the Timaru Harbour Board meeting and at the Mackenzie County Council meeting. The headmaster of Waimataitai School referred with deep regret to the death of their former teacher.

Leslie George O'Callaghan named his brother, Sydney Robert O'Callaghan, and his brother-in-law, Thomas David MacKenzie, as executors of his will (dated 16 September 1916). His trustees were the recipients of his medals – British War Medal and Victory Medal. The plaque and scroll were sent in 1922 to his widow, Mrs J. M. O'Callaghan, care of Timaru solicitors. In 1919 his father, of 20 Craigie Street, Timaru, received the Parchment Commission of his son.

L. G. O'Callaghan is remembered on many local memorials - Timaru South Africa War Memorial (served in South African War & fell in the GreatWar), Timaru Memorial Wall, Sherwood Downs-Ashwick Flat Memorial, Fairlie War Memorial, St Mary's Church Memorial, St Stephen's Anglican Church, Fairlie; Sacred Heart Church, Timaru, and Waimataitai School Memorial; and on the Lincoln War Memorial.

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