

*Timaru Herald*. 4 August 1900 (Papers Past) [13/10/2017]

## THE TRANSVAAL

A letter has been received from Trooper Leslie O'Callaghan, of the Second Contingent, by a friend in Timaru, and we were kindly permitted to make a few extracts. The writer says that the Contingent had seen any amount of fighting, and had been under all kinds of fire. It was not till he got to the Zand River that he had the first brush, he being attached to the Lancers till he reached the Contingent. The Boer shelling was done by the noted PomPoms. but no one was hurt. The shells are small, one pound, and the damage they do results more in disorganisation than in personal injury, as they generally need to strike an object before harming it. The Contingent moved to the west of Bothaville to disarm a few discontents, and evidently had a good time, "lived high, there being plenty of geese." They then went north, all that they saw of the enemy being a few patrols. One day Smith, of Timaru, was sent back for something to the rear, got lost, and ran into a party of Boer scouts. He was watering his horse and had his rifle slung over his shoulder. The Boers demanded his surrender, speaking very candidly, and he made a grasp for his rifle, but got a bullet uncomfortably close and had to surrender. Smith was sent to Pretoria until all the prisoners were freed. "I have seen him since, and he was in good health." On May 25th the Vaal River was crossed and next day they had an engagement. "The Boers were uncomfortably close, and the Second Contingent and part of the First were sent to clear them away. Our division under Lieutenant Findlay got going first. We advanced in extended order, and when we got over a small rise we got a few shells, and saw the Boers on the flat in front of us. They were sheltered by ant-hills and peppered us as we advanced, and we lay down for shelter. When part of the Third came up the enemy cleared, and we went after them for about a mile.

. . . . The Boers used explosive bullets. On the way back we found two dead Boers and three wounded, and several prisoners were taken. . . . Captain Chaytor was wounded in this engagement. He was hit by a bullet, which was fired over our heads. We saw no more Boers until we got near Johannesburg and Oliphants Vlei. The Boers were in position there, but the position of their guns was not known. The G Battery, R.H.A., and the New Zealanders were sent to draw their fire. We advanced in extended order, invited their fire, and got it. Several shells landed amongst us, and dirt and dust were thrown over us, one chap getting his helmet blown off. One could not help laughing at the way our fellows took the shelling. Our artillery got going, and then the South Island Company of No. 2 Contingent was sent to occupy the kopje. We clambered across the fiat and got shot at on the way. Our section consisted of Moody, Knubley, Aitkin, and myself. We engaged the Boers, and I was firing with Knubley for some time when he left to go higher up. This was about 12 o'clock, and at 3 p.m. Knubley was shot in the chest . . . . Butcher, of Waimate, stayed with him and did all he could . . . . The rest of the New Zealanders remained on the flat, and it was there that poor Byrne was killed." Details follow of other engagements passed through till Pretoria was reached, where Trooper O'Callaghan accepted the offer to enter the Transvaal Constabulary. He will probably stay in the Transvaal for three months at least, and have a look round before returning. The letter concludes with messages to old Timaru friends, specially mentioning members of the Timaru Football Club.

*Inangahua Times*. 16 August 1900 (Papers Past) [13/10/2017]

Trooper Leslie O'Callaghan, (a grandson of Mr and Mrs Hindmarsh, of Reefton), who went to South Africa with the Second Contingent under Major Cradock, writes long letters to his parents in Christchurch from Pretoria. In his last, dated June 26th, he writes that the New Zealand Contingents Nos. 1, 2, and 3, had some heavy work and hard fighting between Kroonstad and Pretoria. He says — “General Hutton praised us up properly, and said we did splendid work, and had mentioned us in his reports to Lord Roberts.” Our Major (Major Cradock) is a grand fellow, and has won our hearts properly. He is as brave as he could be. General French rated him one day for being too eager to get his men into action, but we would follow him anywhere, and he knows it. I saw Johannesburg. It is a great city, but very deserted looking now. We passed through Pretoria. It is the prettiest town I ever saw. The buildings are really beautiful, and there are also some fine gardens, and oranges, the groves are beautiful, but they suffer if the troops go near them. They are the best oranges I ever tasted. Some of the Boer papers (they are sold at £1 each now) contain absurd reports of our defeats. One says, “It is a well known fact that 67, 600 British have fallen in the war, while only 1000 Boers have shared the same fate.” At the Klip River fight they reported the British fled towards the Vaal, leaving 2000 on the field. I have spoken to some surrendered Boers, and they say they don't know what their losses are, as the papers are not allowed to publish them. They don't like the colonial troops, and they reckon them much harder to shoot than the Tommies. Our fellows all great supporters of Mr Seddon, and appreciate his energy and perseverance in getting such a lot of men away. Our outfit was the best I have seen out here, and wore splendidly,

*Star.* 10 December 1900 (PP) [16/10/2017]

### **A LETTER FROM TROOPER O'CALLAGHAN.**

The following extracts have been taken from a letter written by Trooper L. G. O'Callaghan, of the Second Contingent, from Pretoria, on Oct. 28:—

“The Contingent is camped a few miles out of town, close to the Racecourse, where our men were kept prisoners. We had a rough time a few days ago. On Friday morning we all turned out at 1 a.m., saddled up, and started for a place called Commando's Nek, on the Crocodile River. When we started it was pouring with rain, and lightning like fun. It was not a pleasant march. At the Nek we went through a pass in search of a party of Boers, who have been giving some trouble lately. That night we got a fearful dose of rain. We were up at 2 a.m., continued our search, but found nothing but their camp fires. We got back to camp next evening, pretty tired, and found that fifty of the First Contingent had left for New Zealand. I am afraid our turn is a long way off.

The day before we went out on the expedition we took part in a big inarch past Lord Roberts. A flag was hoisted in the Square, and ‘Bobs’ stood under it. It was a splendid sight to see thousands of troops march by. The New Zealanders went by in fine style. We were mounted on fresh horses, and they kept in fine line. “Bobs” gave an address to the New Zealanders, and afterwards presented Sergeant Cassidy, of the Second, with the Royal Humane Society's medal.

“Captain Crawshaw is a great success, and is trusted by us all. He is a plucky fellow, and one of our best officers.

“I would like you to see some of us when we come off the veldt, after a few days marching — grimy is not the word, but it's a fine life. Frank Knubbing, J. Goldstone, of Waimate, W. Butcher, of the same place, and myself are all in the same section.

*Timaru Herald.* 23 September 1916 (PP)

Captain **Leslie** O'Callaghan writes from Featherston Camp:—"Books and magazines are greatly appreciated during the rather dull hours on board a transport, and as many of the men of C Company 18 hail from South Canterbury, I will gladly accept, on their behalf, any bundles of reading matter which your readers may have to spare. If such bundles are addressed to me at Trentham Camp before October 5th, I will receive them in time to distribute on board ship."

*Auckland Star.* 13 November 1916 (PP) [15/10/2017]

## EIGHTEENTH REINFORCEMENT

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### AUCKLAND'S "SEND-OFF."

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#### APPRECIATED BY THE MEN.

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The Mayor (Mr. J. H. Gunson) has received a letter from Captain **Leslie** O'Callaghan (Officer Commanding the 18th Reinforcements), which reads as follows:—"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."

*Timaru Herald.* 22 October 1917 (page 11) [23/06/2014]

## **CAPTAIN O'CALLAGHAN.**

### **KILLED IN ACTION.**

News of the death in action of Captain Leslie O'Callaghan, of Timaru, was received on Saturday with profound regret. At the same time it did not occasion surprise, for everyone who knew him felt when he left as officer commanding his company that where-ever the fight was hottest there he would be, if not in the front line, as near to it as he could get. A gallant man, who knew no fear, he had a winsome manner which made a friend for him of each with whom he came in contact. This was so in business, and the men who left for the front under him had nothing but praise and admiration for their leader. His bold spirit prompted him to go twice to the Boer war, and starting as a private there he returned with the Eighth Contingent as a Lieutenant. After his South African experience he started business in Waimate as an auctioneer, and following a successful period there he came to Timaru to enlarge the scope of his activities, when he entered into partnership with Mr E. A. LeCren, the firm being known as O'Callaghan and LeCren. In 1915 when Sherwood Downs was cut up for closer settlement his wife drew one of the runs, and Mr O'Callaghan then relinquished his town business and went to live on the run. At Sherwood Downs he soon became a leading personality among the settlers who parted from him with extreme regret when he decided that his place was at the war, and left his comfortable home and lucrative sheep property to serve the Empire. He joined the Eighteenth Reinforcements, leaving New Zealand with the rank of Captain—an office for which he was well fitted. His wife went Home when he went and is now working in one of the English hospitals. His parents are living in Timaru, and he leaves one child—a little girl. Deceased's father has been a very constant war worker ever since hostilities started, and he still lends very valuable assistance to the Ladies' Patriotic Society with unfailing regularity. The deceased Captain was a son to be proud of, and his parents and widow have the satisfaction of knowing that he died as he lived—gallantly, in the service of others.

*Sun.* 22 October 1917 (PP [15/10/2017])

**The late Captain L. G. O'Callaghan was well known in Timaru and South Canterbury. He belonged to a Timaru family, and was educated and commenced his business career there. Later he removed to Waimate, but subsequently he returned to Timaru, and became a member of the auctioneering firm of LeCren and O'Callaghan. He acquired farming interests at the Cave, but still retained his connection with the firm. His wife, who was formerly a Miss Wheeler, of Waimate, went to England to assist in hospital nursing.**

*Poverty Bay Herald.* 23 October 1917 (PP [15/10/2017])

## ROLL OF HONOUR

**Captain L. G. O'Callaghan, reported killed in action on October 12th, was a son-in-law of Mrs A. Wheeler, Lytton road. Captain O'Callaghan, who left New Zealand in command of the Canterbury section of the 18th Reinforcements, had seen previous service as a lieutenant in the 2nd New Zealand Contingent in the South African War.**

*Temuka Leader.* 23 October 1917 (PP [15/10/2017])

## ROLL OF HONOUR.

Among those who fell in the recent push in Flanders was Captain Leslie O'Callaghan, of Timaru, who at one time carried on an auctioneering business in Timaru, in company with Mr E. A. LeCren. He later went farming at Sherwood Downs, and became just as popular among his farming friends as he had been among his business friends. He left New Zealand as captain in charge of C. Company, and was respected and honoured by his men as an officer. His wife accompanied him to England, and engaged in nursing work. He was well known in football and cricketing circles some years ago, having taken part in interprovincial games. He was a brother of Mr S. R. O'Callaghan, captain of the Geraldine Club, and his death is much to be deplored.

The Geraldine Cricket Club held a practice match on the oval on Monday, about 20 seniors and juniors taking part. Prior to opening the match, the president (Mr B. R. Macdonald) called the players together, and said that it had at first been thought that it would be advisable to abandon the game on account of the death of the late Captain Leslie O'Callaghan, an old and honoured cricketer, but on second thoughts they had decided to go on with the match, as those who knew him felt sure that that would have been his wish.

Mr G. N. Feilden, vice captain, also spoke, continuing the president's words, and paying a high tribute to the late captain's qualities as a man and a cricketer.

Mr Macdonald moved that the secretary write to the relatives of the late Captain O'Callaghan, expressing the sympathy of members with them in their sad loss.

This was put to the meeting, and was carried in silence.

Following is a copy of a letter received in Wellington from **Captain O'Callaghan**, C Company, 18th Reinforcements: "Pvt. H. S. (Sam) Simmons, who left New Zealand under my command in C Company, 18th Reinforcements, was not with his company at the time he met his death, but was killed on June 14 near Messines, and buried on the battlefield. Pvt. Simmons was very popular with both officers and comrades, and was regarded by all as a brave and daring soldier." **Captain O'Callaghan** also states that the deceased soldier was always cheerful and ready to help any less fortunate comrade in camp and in the trenches, and his death was widely regretted.