



Edmund Bowler

Edmund Robert Bowler

Edmund Bowler was born at Inchclutha near Balclutha in 1866. He was the son of Edmund and Jane Bowler. He graduated with a law degree from Otago University in 1888 and married Mary Ethel Hepburn in 1890.

They had three daughters who enjoyed a relatively privileged upbringing. Two of the girls attended finishing schools in France.

Edmund established a legal practice in Gore. He was very involved in local military groups being Lieutenant-Colonel in the 7th Southland Mounted Rifles.

He enlisted for service in November 1914.

On the 25th April 1915 he was the first New Zealander to step ashore at Gallipoli.* He was the Military Beach Landing Officer. He was to oversee all landing and departure from the beach and in the first few days watched as about 3,000 wounded were sent out to waiting ships. He observed the now known deficiencies in the planning of the offensive and in the leadership of the men. His position as Landing Officer meant he was in contact with those in leadership positions and unfortunately he made his views known. Speaking out against leadership and planning in a time of conflict was not looked upon kindly especially when New Zealanders were being lead to believe the campaign was a successful operation.

In September 1915 Edmund was medically evacuated to London where he met Thomas MacKenzie the New Zealand High Commissioner. Again he made his views known regarding the campaign.

In February 1916 he returned to duty and was sent to Egypt thinking he would be returning to active service, but four days later he was sent home to New Zealand arriving here in April 1916. He was discharged from service.

Back in New Zealand Edmund returned to his legal practice. At the wars end Lieutenant-General Sir William Birdwood from England, who was known by Edmund, was touring New Zealand acknowledging the service of our country towards the war cause. When the tour was to visit Gore the Lieutenant-General absented himself from that days visit leaving his wife to visit the town. His absence from the Gore visit was thought to be a snub to Bowler and one could imagine that the General probably had no wish to socialize with the man who had been so critical of his country's army commanders and their organization of the Gallipoli campaign.

Edmund retired in 1927 and moved to Timaru and died later that year. Although slightly wounded twice he was never mentioned in despatches or decorated. There are claims that his War Records have been purged of some of his personal records. His gravestone in the Timaru Cemetery does not record anything of his military service in World War 1. Edmund Bowler was a man of conscience and honesty but he paid dearly for his convictions.

*SCROLL editor's note: On the 25 April 1915 Bowler was the first member of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force ashore, landing between 7.00 and 8.00am off the transport ship A8 Lake Michigan. He was not the first New Zealander to step ashore, despite claims of that in a recent biography of Bowlers, as other New Zealanders were enlisted with the Australian forces that landed about three hours earlier. Bowler was the Military Beach Landing Officer for the 4th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force which landed as members of the Second Wave.