

Private Matthew McArthur©

Regimental number: 12/3397

2nd Battalion, Auckland Regiment, New Zealand Expeditionary Force

born: 2 November 1888 – died: 25 June 1916

Private Matthew McArthur was born on 2 November 1888 in Dunedin, on the South Island in New Zealand. By the time he enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force he was living in Helensville, just outside Auckland, on the North Island, where he was a road contractor. He was living there with his wife, the former Mary Howitt Russell, whom he had married on 12 September 1911, and their first child, David John (born on 29 July 1912). A second son, Joseph Henry (born on 14 November 1915), was born a few months after Matthew enlisted and two days after he went overseas.¹

He enlisted as a private in the Auckland Infantry Battalion on 24 May 1915 in Trentham—a military camp near Wellington. He was 5' 7" tall, a Presbyterian and had a fresh complexion, blue eyes and thinning auburn hair. He joined A Company of the 8th Reinforcements and went overseas, leaving from Wellington² on 12 November 1915 and arriving in the Suez on 20 December.

Matthew's time on the front lines was short. He was posted to Somalia where, after just a few days, he was hospitalized, initially in Somalia, in the NZ Auxiliary Hospital, and then in Abbissia, Cairo at the NZ General Hospital. He was suffering from haemorrhoids. In March 1916, he was moved to Lady Godley's Home in Zeitoun and then to the NZ Base Depot in Ghezireh. In April, he transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Auckland Infantry Brigade and, on 8 April, he embarked on the HT *Ascania* for France and the Western Front.

The 2nd Auckland Battalion was part of the 2nd New Zealand Brigade, which went into Houplines near Armentieres in May 1916.³ Less than two months after arriving, Matthew was a casualty. On 24 June he was wounded and admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with a gunshot wound that lacerated his right thigh. He died the following day and was buried in Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Grave Reference: II, E, 155). His death and burial was reported by Rev. E. K. Whallet, who was attached to No. 1 CCCS.

Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several casualty clearing stations, including No. 1 Canadian CCS, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918; they occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when soldiers' remains were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.⁴



Private M. McArthur's gravestone
Source: New Zealand War Graves Project

<http://www.nzwargraves.org.nz/>

Matthew was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915). They were sent to his widow, who was living at 4th Avenue in Helensville. His widow later remarried, marrying Robert Gray in 1924.⁵

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¹ "Military personnel files," *New Zealand Defence Force, Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga* (<http://archives.govt.nz/world-war-one>: accessed 26 October 2016), entry for McArthur, Matthew, Description: - WW1 12/3397 - Army; Record no: 0071237; R no: R10922345; Series: 18805. Unless otherwise noted, all information about his military career and personal life comes from this source.

² "Private Matthew McArthur," *New Zealand War Graves Project* (<http://www.nzwargraves.org.nz/>: accessed 3 November 2016)

³ "The New Zealand Division in France and Flanders May 1916 to November 1918: A Contemporary Diary of Pilgrimages in Their Footsteps April 2002 and July 2005," Revised Edition 2005, John H. Gray, Christchurch, New Zealand (<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Publications/NewZealandDivisionInFranceAndFlanders/NewZealandDivisionInFranceAndFlanders.pdf>: accessed 30 August 2016)

⁴ "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>: accessed 5 August 2015)

⁵ "New Zealand, Marriage Index, 1840–1934," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 October 2016), entry for Mary Howitt McArthur, Folio number: 1128