

12/321 ALLAN CLAUDE COOPER



Auckland Infantry Regiment

Military Cross (Lieut. A.C. COOPER. 15.9.16)

1914-15 Star

British War Medal 1914-19

Victory Medal

Allan Claude COOPER was born on 10 February 1893 at Great Barrier Island in the Hauraki Gulf of New Zealand. His parents were William and Margaret Anne (Annie) Cooper. His father William was an early settler on the island and his mother Annie (nee Haskiss) was from Tuakau in South Auckland.

Allan's parents were married at Tuakau on 5 March 1889 by the Reverend Thomas Norrie who was an army chaplain during the New Zealand Wars and was awarded an Imperial issue New Zealand War Medal for services throughout South Auckland and the Waikato during the war.

A little over two months after Allen's birth, his father was killed in a logging accident on 19 April 1893.

"William Cooper was killed on Great Barrier Island while engaged in bush work with a mate named Warren. The two men were standing on scaffolding, cross-cutting a kauri tree which they had just felled. When the log broke off the remaining part of the tree fell also, and knocked away the timber on which they were standing. Warren escaped unhurt, but Cooper fell on his neck against a tree and was instantly killed."²⁷

Annie subsequently married Thomas Agnew in 1898. Allan Cooper and the children from Annie's second marriage lived together in Waihi where Thomas was a gold miner.

On leaving school, Allan trained as a plumber and by 1914 he had completed his apprenticeship and was employed by the Waihi Grand Junction Gold Mining Company as a plumber.

Allan was a handy footballer and was selected to play as a forward for the Goldfields and Waihi rugby teams in 1913 - 1914.

Whilst at school, Alan was a member of the Junior School cadets for 2 years and subsequently joined the Waihi Rifles reaching the rank of Colour Sergeant Major before receiving his commission as 2nd Lieutenant in "E" (Waihi) Company, 6th Hauraki Infantry Regiment.



The Grand Junction gold mine at Waihi, 1910²⁸

On the outbreak of WWI, Allan Cooper enlisted for war service on 11 August 1914 at Paeroa and was posted to the Hauraki Company of Auckland Infantry Regiment, in which he had previously served as a territorial.

The Auckland Infantry Battalion was based at Alexandra Park in Auckland and Allan commenced his training there immediately. Training was not that hard with the highlight being a 15 mile route march south, returning the next day. After a farewell on Auckland Domain, the Battalion boarded HMNZT 12 (ss Waimana) on 23 September 1914 for overseas.

²⁷ "Fatal Accident". Auckland Star, 20 April 1893, p. 9.
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18930420.2.67>

²⁸ "The Grand Junction gold mine at Waihi, 1910". Godber, Albert Percy, 1875-1949 Collection of albums, prints and negatives. Ref: APG-0410-1/2-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22811083>



MARCHING FROM THE CITY TO THE DOMAIN, WHERE THE OFFICIAL FAREWELL TOOK PLACE: INFANTRY PASSING OVER GRAFTON BRIDGE

Members of the Auckland Infantry Battalion march over Grafton Bridge, Auckland, on 23 September 1914. They are on their way to the Domain for the official farewell to the Auckland section of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.²⁹

The ship soon returned to Auckland after coming into contact with the German Pacific Fleet north of New Zealand. They re-embarked and departed for Wellington on to join the remainder of the Main Body fleet. The NZEF Main Body departed from Wellington on 16 October for Egypt travelling via Hobart in Tasmania, Albany in Western Australia and Colombo in Ceylon. They arrived at Alexandria on 4 December 1914 and immediately travelled by train to Zeitoun Camp, near Cairo, where they continued their military preparation for the next four months.

During this training period, Allan was promoted three times leading up to ANZAC. He was promoted to Lance Corporal on 17 October 1914, Corporal on 1 January 1915 and Sergeant on 7 April 1915.

On 10 April Auckland Infantry Battalion boarded the captured German troopship Lutzow at Alexandria for their journey to Lemnos to await the anticipated “great adventure”. On the 24th, Lutzow took its place in the Landing fleet and sailed for Turkey.

Auckland Infantry Battalion landed at ANZAC Cove on the Gallipoli Peninsula at 12am on 25th April. The Auckland Infantry Battalion took the north flank avoiding Turkish fire when possible, receiving few casualties and advancing so far inland that they had to be ordered to fall back. Reinforced with men from the Canterbury Infantry Battalion and several Australian battalions, the unit repulsed waves of Turkish attacks that day and night.

By the 2nd May the Turkish attacks had faded and the Auckland Infantry Battalion was transported to Cape Helles to take part in the 2nd Battle of Krithia on the 8th May. The New Zealanders took their objective but incurred heavy casualties and were relieved by British troops and the unit returned to ANZAC cove.

7th August signalled the commencement of the August Offensive with the objective of capturing the high ground at Chunuk Bair and beyond. The Australians made their now immortalised attacks on The Nek and Lone Pine while the New Zealanders advanced on Chunuk Bair. New Zealand Mounted Rifles units cleared the flanks and the Auckland Infantry Battalion cleared the path leading up to the summit of Chunuk Bair. That night the Wellington Infantry Battalion advanced with cover of darkness and took the summit on the night of 8-9th August. On the 10th August an entire Turkish division counter-attacked and retook Chunuk Bair inflicting heavy losses on the allies.

The Auckland Infantry Battalion was reorganised and reinforced and Allan was appointed Acting Sergeant Major on 29 September 1915 as part of this.

The unsuccessful August offensive led to the British command to decide that they would retreat from Gallipoli. Careful planning then followed to ensure that all troops were successfully evacuated. Alan Cooper was one of the last New Zealanders to leave ANZAC. He embarked on HT Varsova which was moored off ANZAC Cove and sailed for Alexandria, reaching there on 29 December 1915.

Once back in Egypt, the entire NZEF underwent a major reorganisation in early 1916, when a full New Zealand Division was formed. The original infantry brigade was renamed 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and a 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade was created. The second brigade’s structure mirrored that of the first, with four regional battalions of 1000 men apiece. The battalions’ order of seniority was: Auckland, Canterbury, Otago, and Wellington.

²⁹ 'Infantry marching over Grafton Bridge', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/infantry-marching-over-grafton-bridge>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 17-May-2017

The Auckland Infantry Battalion was therefore split into two battalions, the 1st and 2nd. Allan Cooper was transferred to the 2nd Battalion Auckland Infantry Battalion and promoted to 2nd Lieutenant on 1 March 1916. The battalions were further reinforced with fresh troops from New Zealand and joined by the 3rd and 4th Battalions formed in New Zealand

The 2nd Battalion Auckland Infantry Battalion, including Alan, embarked on HT Ascania for France on 7 April 1916 and arrived in Marseilles six days later. They were transported by train to Steenbecque and billeted in nearby Rebecque. Their first trench war experience commenced on 14th May when the 2nd Battalion moved into the fighting line at Armentieres. Their first trench raid occurred in early June and they remain in vicinity, rotating through front line and rest until 20th August when they were sent to a camp at Allery for re-equipping, organisation and battle training.

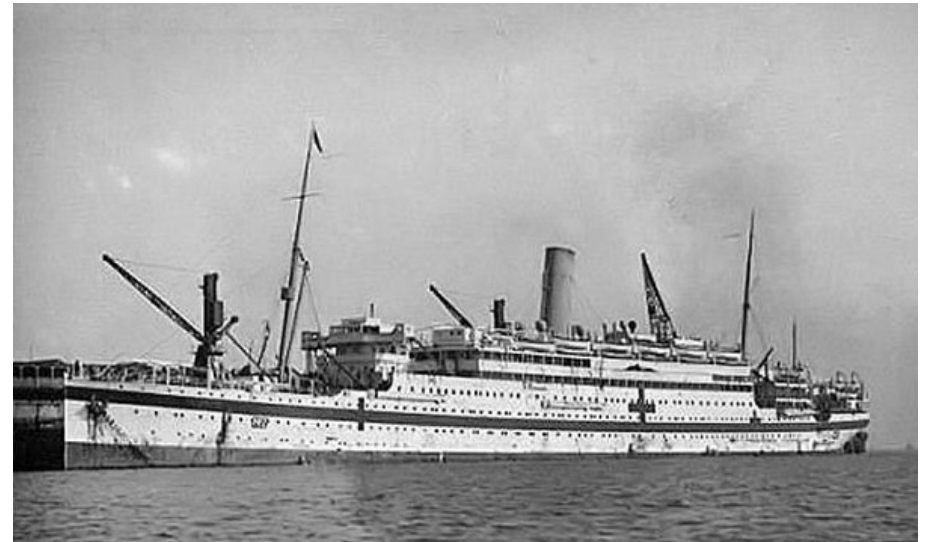
The 2nd Battalion moved to the front line on 12 September facing Flers and the following days slowly advanced under the creeping artillery barrage to engage the German trenches in what has become the Battle of the Somme.

"Very eagerly the Aucklanders press forward close to the heels of their barrage. They are too eager. They press too closely, and many fall from the bursts of their own shells. "Crest Trench," the Hun observation post, is reached—a few shots and bayonet thrusts and it is passed. Now there is a quickening of the pulse. Below in the rain of shells is the Switch Line. They close down upon it. Forty yards away the leading waves merge. They wait for the barrage to lift. There is shooting and bombing at short range. The line of gleaming bayonets, of staring eyes and of set, drawn faces, is waiting for the signal to dash in on this trench, packed with Huns. In places the enemy stand shoulder to shoulder. Now the stick grenades are coming over in showers, for there are brave men amongst them, who see that if they can but stay this attacking line, hold it at bombing range for a few moments, then the time of grace will have passed, the machine-guns will come into play, and the "verdammt Englanders" will be mown down, as they have been time and time again during the last few weeks. But now the third wave has come up. Lieutenants Tuck, Cooper, Senior and Stewart, the platoon commanders, Sergeant Hill, Sergeant Gordon, the section leaders, men here and there all along the line, take the initiative. The wave breaks and floods over the Hun line. Many of the enemy died fighting very bravely, many were shot down endeavouring to retreat down the hill, some were bayoneted screaming for mercy, but none except the

wounded escaped. Few prisoners were taken by 2/Auckland."³⁰

"2/Auckland held Switch Trench through the night, and next morning were relieved, going back to Check Line and Thistle Dump. The losses had been considerable. Six officers, Captains Hunter and Armstrong, Lieutenants Dagg, Sheridan, McLean and Bremner were killed, while Lieutenant Page, one of the original Main Body sergeant-majors, a very brave and able soldier, died of wounds. Fifty-two O.R.'s were killed. Seven officers, Captain Grainger, Lieutenants Cooper, Hewitt, Tuck, Hudson, Raine and McClurg, were wounded, also 231 O.R.'s. Twelve men were missing, making a total of 309 casualties."³¹

Alan Cooper received a gunshot wound to the left arm during the action on 15 September 1916 and was admitted to No 1 New Zealand Field Ambulance. he was transferred to No 8 General Hospital at Rouen the day after.



Hospital Ship Asturias

He embarked for England on Hospital Ship Asturias on 18 September and was admitted to No 1 New Zealand General Hospital at Brockenhurst on 19 September 1916

³⁰ Burton, 2/Lieut O.E. (1922). The Auckland Regiment, being an account of the goings on Active Service of the First, Second and Third Battalions of the Auckland Regiment. Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., p. 108.

³¹ Ibid., p. 110.

where his wounds were treated.

Allan Cooper was awarded the Military Cross for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty during the Somme attack.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 25 NOVEMBER, 1916.

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to confer the Military Cross on the undermentioned Officers and Warrant Officers in recognition of their gallantry and devotion to duty in the Field:—

NEW ZEALAND FORCE.

2nd Lt. Allan Claude Cooper, Inf.

For conspicuous gallantry in action. He led his platoon with great courage and initiative. Later, although wounded, he remained at his post. Previously he captured an enemy machine gun himself.³²

Cooper was discharged from Brockenhurst and transferred back to the Reserve group of the Auckland Infantry which based at Sling Camp in Bulford, near Salisbury in England on 7 November 1916 and was immediately taken onto the strength of NZEF HQ in London where he remained until 27 November. He returned to Sling Camp in preparation for his return to France which occurred on 12 December.

On arrival in France, he reported to New Zealand Infantry and General Base Depot at Etaples, France where he remained until 16 January 1917. He then rejoined his battalion in the field. A month later he presented at No 1 NZ Field Ambulance and immediately sent to the 1st Australian Casualty Clearing Station and subsequently transferred to No 8 Stationary Hospital at Boulogne on 13 February 1917. He was moved to No 7 Stationary Hospital at Boulogne and then on to No 39 General Hospital at Havre on 17 February where he was treated for epididymitis. He was discharged on 5 April 1917 and returned to New Zealand Infantry and General Base Depot.

He was promoted to Lieutenant on 8 May 1917 and on 22 May he rejoined his 2nd Battalion Auckland Regiment which was now facing Messines and preparing for a major advance.

On 7 June 1917 at 6.40am, the Auckland and Hauraki Companies advanced to a

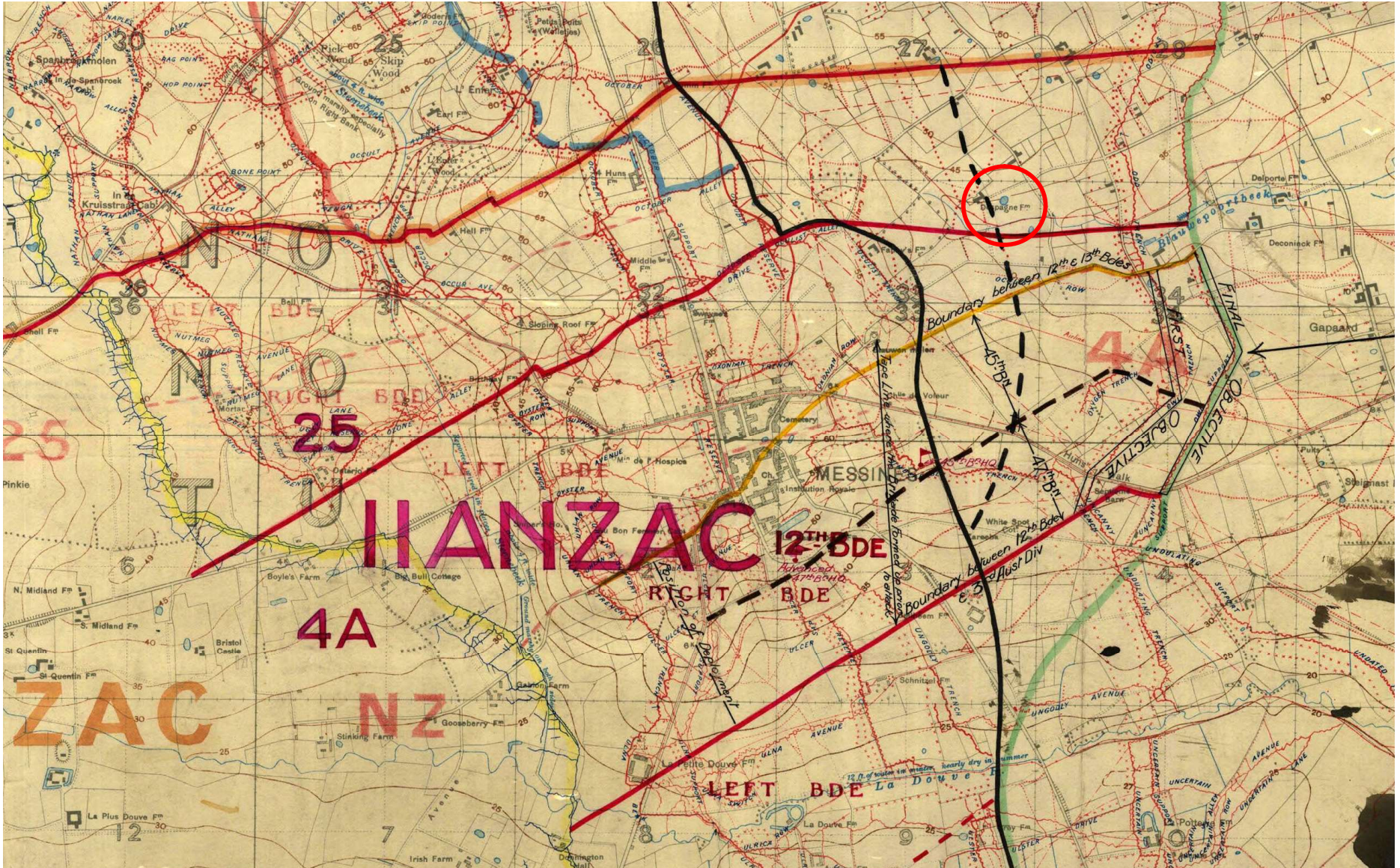
position to the rear of the Black Line, from where they established four posts on the Black Dotted Line. A 77mm field gun was captured and along with the two taken by 1 Auckland, were the first field guns to be taken by the New Zealand Division. At 9.40 a.m. patrols were sent out to the Green Line and reported that the wire in front had been cut. However, later that morning the Germans opened up with a furious barrage on the Black Line. In the afternoon, the 4th Australian Division advanced through the Battalion's lines but on advancing to the Green Line lost direction with the failure of a British Brigade to arrive on their left flank and were subject to enfilading fire. Confined to their trenches for the next 2 days, the Battalion had to endure both the counter-barrage from the Germans and Allied artillery falling short.

It was during the advance of 7 June 1917 that Lieutenant Allan Claude Cooper was killed in action. He was buried 200 yards SSW of Despagne Farm on 12 June 1917.



NZ wounded soldiers being attended to by ambulance corps at an advanced dressing station in the German second line at Messines. NATLIB.GOV.NZ: 1/2-012773-G

³² Supplement to the London Gazette, 25 November 1916, p.11550.



ANZAC advance-7 June 1917. (Despaigne Farm where Lieutenant Cooper was killed is circled in red)

On July 9, 1917, after the Battle of Messines in Belgium, Chaplain Captain Father James McMenamin who was Roman Catholic chaplain from Petone in Wellington and attached to the Canterbury Regiment, was conducting a funeral service for fallen soldiers when the enemy fired a shell into the congregation. Six soldiers were injured, and Father McMenamin was killed. One wonders whether that service was for Lieutenant Cooper.

After the war, Lieutenant Cooper's grave could not be located, most probably because of the subsequent bombardments that obliterated the area. As he has no known grave, Lieutenant Allan Claude Cooper is now commemorated on Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial to the Missing in Belgium.

Allan Cooper's Military Cross was presented to his mother by the Governor-General at Morrinsville on 2 August 1918.

Many towns in New Zealand were able to obtain war trophies, especially field guns, for local display as part of their local memorial. There were suggestions in the Waihi – Paeroa district encouraging the local council to obtain the German machine gun captured by Lieutenant Cooper.

The Mayor has been advised that the German machine gun captured by Lieut. Allen Cooper is at Paeroa. Mr Donaldson is endeavouring to get this war trophy for the Waihi Central School, where Lieut. Cooper was educated. It will be remembered that Lieut. Allan Cooper won military distinction, and that he was killed shortly after the capture of the machine gun in question. His mother, Mrs Agnew, resides in Barry Road, Waihi.³³

Subsequent newspaper reports suggest that this might have been achieved.

The Town Clerk of Paeroa has advised the Mayor of Waihi that the machine gun captured by Lieutenant Cooper, dead (son of Mrs Agnew, of Barry Road, Waihi) during the war, has reached Paeroa, and is being sent on immediately to Waihi. As this is the only trophy sent on so far to the Hauraki district, the people of Waihi will, as the Mayor remarked, appreciate the thoughtfulness which prompted the authorities at Paeroa to send the gun on to Waihi, as its sentimental value will be recognised owing to its capture by one of the local soldiers, who gave his life in the defence of civilisation and the empire in the great struggle. Provided other

trophies come forward later, it is not improbable that the gun will be finally handed over to the Central School, of which the late Lieutenant Cooper was a pupil. If this is done it will serve to keep green in the memories of the children the fine deeds performed by those who so nobly gave their services, and in many instances made the supreme sacrifice, in the cause of liberty and justice against oppression.³⁴



(Auckland Libraries)³⁵

³³ "Local and General". Waihi Daily Telegraph, 29 June 1920, p.2.
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WHDT19200629.2.8>

³⁴ "Local and General". Waihi Daily Telegraph. 30 September 1920, p.2.
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WHDT19200930.2.7>

³⁵ Lieutenant A.C. Cooper. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19170628-40-5