

# *The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand* *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mihinare ki Aotearoa*

## *Casualties of War*

Frances Haultain and Evelyn Mary Purchas

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On Anzac Day we remember those who died in World War 1 and later wars. The focus is on those who served in the armed services: theirs are the names on the many war memorials around the country. Very few women are commemorated in Anzac Days rituals or on local war memorials although women did die in war time service. Most of those were nurses, many of whom are commemorated in other memorials such as the Nurses' Memorial Chapel in Christchurch. The Five Sisters Window in York Minster is 'sacred to the memory of the women of the Empire who gave their lives in the war of 1914- 1918', listing the names of the women and the organisations in which they served.

### **Sister Frances Haultain**

The Howick and Pakuranga war memorial on Stockade Hill, Howick, erected in 1921, is unusual in that it lists the name of Sister Frances B.M. Haultain but this was added much later than the names of the twenty-nine men from the district who died in World War 1 - and she had no connection with the district!

Frances Blanche Madeline Haultain was born in Palmerston North in 1866, to parents Clara Anne Florence Haultain and Arthur Robertson Theodore Haultain. Her father was a nephew of Colonel Haultain, well-known soldier and politician and prominent Anglican layman. Arthur Haultain spent many years in the civil service, ending his career as Town Clerk in Grey Lynn, Auckland. He died aged 56 in September 1911 leaving his widow, a son, and two daughters.

Frances Haultain trained as a nurse in the Royal Infirmary, Dundee, Scotland, a major teaching hospital. When the war broke out, she was Charge Sister at the Deaconess Hospital in Edinburgh, highly regarded as a training school for missionary nurses. Her uncle, well-known Dr Francis Haultain, served as a gynaecologist at the hospital. The Board of Management offered 40 beds to the War Office. Some were situated in the wards while a large mission hall attached to the hospital was converted into a large ward paid for by the Red Cross. Thus, it was not a Military Hospital, but soldiers were nursed there. Haultain decided to volunteer for nursing service in Europe but on her uncle's advice returned first to New Zealand to visit her widowed mother. There she volunteered and was sent by the Public Health Department to Samoa, to assist in the public hospital in Apia. Samoa had been occupied by New Zealand troops, at the request of the British government since late August 1914. Seven nurses accompanied the Expeditionary Force to replace the German nurses at the public hospital in Apia which served both military and civilian patients. Haultain sailed for Samoa on the SS Talune, a steamship converted to a troopship, on 10 January 1916. Unfortunately, she became ill after only a few months and was sent back to New Zealand but died en route, in hospital in Suva, Fiji. The cause of her death on 16 June 1916 was given as meningitis. Her mother and sister who had sailed to bring her home arrived too late.

Haultain's body was brought to Auckland and family members were in the process of arranging

a military funeral when a telegram from the army authorities cancelled this, on the grounds that her work in Samoa was in a civil, not a military, capacity. Haultain was buried in the graveyard at St Andrew's Church, Epsom, next to her father. The epitaph on the headstone reads 'laid down her life in the service of the Empire', as does her death notice in the Auckland Star.

Members of Haultain's family tried for years to gain military recognition for her service. In 2008 her name was added to the Howick and Pakuranga war memorial as the result of determined lobbying by a relative who lived in the area. Haultain is also now included in the Online Cenotaph of the Auckland War Memorial Museum though the record states that she 'was not on the strength of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, or for the Imperial Forces.'

### **Military Funerals**

If Haultain had had a military funeral, what would it have been like? Military funerals differ greatly according to the circumstances, the site, and the rank of the deceased. For a funeral in a church followed by a burial in a civilian cemetery the following elements would be usual: a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in charge; six pallbearers; a firing squad/guard of honour; a bugler, a flag draping the casket. At the end of the service at the graveside the firing squad would fire three volleys and the bugler would play Taps.

### **Evelyn Mary Purchas (nee Morse)**

Evelyn was one of a large but unknown number of women who volunteered their services during World War 1. In so doing she lost her life. She was born in Dursley, Gloucestershire, in March 1867, emigrated with her parents to New Zealand where they lived in Parnell. On 3 November 1887 at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Evelyn married Arthur Challinor Purchas, in a service conducted by the Bishop of Auckland assisted by Archdeacon Dudley and the Revd Dr Arthur Guyon Purchas, father of the groom (and of 13

other children). Arthur Challinor Purchas was born in February 1860 in the Parsonage, Onehunga, and educated at King's College. He trained in Edinburgh, studied for a year in Vienna, then practised as an ophthalmologist and oculist in Symonds Street while living with his wife and three sons in Carlton Gore Road. He enlisted immediately on the outbreak of World War 1 and sailed with the main body of the Expeditionary Force in October 1914 as Senior Medical Officer to the Auckland Infantry Battalion with the rank of Major. His oldest son, Private Arthur de Beaufre Purchas, sailed at the same time.

In January 1915 Evelyn Purchas sailed for Egypt, on the way leaving her youngest son at a boarding school in England. On arrival in Alexandria, she began work as a voluntary assistant at the 17<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, set up by the British Army in a former school. With over 1,000 beds the hospital began seriously understaffed and hastily preparing for an influx of wounded from the Gallipoli campaign. Because of the dire shortage of nurses, Purchas was chosen to manage the Officers' Quarters, about 50 beds in 21 small wards on two storeys. Working from 7am to 8pm she dealt with everything to do with stores, coping with military routine and red tape. With the wife of a wounded officer, she cut up meals, fed helpless men and did all she could for 'the dear fellows.' Purchas wrote home that many men died from want of attention in the wards and tents and lamented: 'The fine, strong men who go away! The shattered wrecks who return - many paralysed besides other wounds ... I know I was supplied with needed strength and management. But oh, how tired I got!' <sup>1</sup>

Purchas learned that her son Arthur had been wounded at Gallipoli and was in hospital in Cairo, but she did not think it right to take a whole day off to visit him when she was so needed in Alexandria. Finally, she did take a day off to see him and arranged for him to be transferred to Alexandria.

Purchas was deeply moved by the suffering of so many at Gallipoli. Writing to a friend in Auckland in May 1915 she suggested that part of the letter might be published as she thought it would give comfort to friends of dead and wounded soldiers. This was done by a number of New Zealand papers (after her death). Purchas described the spot at the Dardanelles where many lives had been sacrificed as exceptionally lovely, covered with beautiful red, white and blue flowers: 'poppies for the garland of sleep, moon-daisies for dear strong lives, bright blue blossoms for heaven and peace'. She wrote of God sending special comfort to the wounded lying on the battlefield, recounting the experiences of a captain and a young lieutenant who had told her

of their pleasant illusions, one seeing his wife and children, with the three little girls filling their pinafores with flowers and bringing them to him.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, Purchas contracted typhoid, presumably from one of her patients, and died on 15 June 1915, just one day before the first 50 New Zealand Army Nursing Service nurses arrived in Alexandria. It is believed that she was given a military funeral although strictly she would not have been entitled to this. Two months later her second son, Thomas Challinor Purchas, aged 20, enlisted. Major Purchas, Arthur and Thomas all survived the war in which his wife and their mother gave her life.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tolerton, Jane, *Make Their Praises Heard Afar: New Zealand Women Overseas in World War One*, Wellington: Booklovers Books, 2017, 75-76.

<sup>2</sup> 'Where Heroes Fall: Field of Wildflowers.' *New Zealand Herald*, 13 July 1915.