

Today I wish to pause and pay our respects to:

4/522 & NZ1017 Lcpl and Sqn Ldr Hugh Gordon **Wilson OBE MM**

Born in the quiet settlement of Porongahau, nestled in Hawkes Bay.

Just 11 days after the declaration of war on August 13, 1914, he completed his medical examinations for enlistment. Driven by an unwavering commitment to serve, he soon became part of the great effort in one of history's most trying conflicts.

Hugh's courage shone during the Gallipoli campaign. He was among the first to land on those unforgiving shores, stepping into the fray under broad daylight at 11:30 a.m., with Turkish machine guns raking the beach. In those chaotic moments, he and his comrades set up a signal office just 50 yards from the shoreline. Within two hours, they had laid telegraph cables to the New Zealand Brigade headquarters and established a network of runners to ensure seamless communication with the Australian Division.

Hugh's journey carried him to France on April 6, 1916, aboard the steamship *Minnewaska*. There, amidst the unrelenting trenches of the Western Front, his valor continued to shine. In December 1916, Hugh was awarded the **Military Medal**, a recognition of gallantry in the field, for an act of bravery that embodied his selflessness and steadfast resolve.

Actions of the taking of Switch Trench and successive objectives during the period from 15th Sept to 15th October 1916 inclusive. As Linesmen on the New Zealand Artillery Lines these men displayed the greatest gallantry throughout the whole period. The nine noteworthy instances are: Longueval to High Wood. 8pm 30th Sept to 6.15am 1st Oct. Running lines for incoming Brigade. Shell fire was continuous and the lines required unceasing repair for 48 hours. 2 October: To Fish Alley. Running lines through barrage for advance of 1st and 2nd NZFA Brigades. Lines were cut in several places before laying was completed and required constant repair. 9th October hostile barrage cut practically all forward lines necessitating prolonged work under fire. 15th October barrage cut all forward lines, line party had barely two hours before our attack but repaired and kept in repair sufficient communications, considerably influencing the success of our attack. Sergeant Moore's conduct was especially noticeable on this occasion. He supervised the whole task owing to his Officers absence at Headquarters. After exhausting all the cable on his drums he collected and made use of destroyed cable in effecting repairs. The whole task being under hostile fire.

During this harrowing time on the front, the grim reality of war was starkly reflected in the words of the Divisional Signal Company's War Diary:

"Conditions were appalling. Our dugouts were wet and dirty, perched alongside a line of duckboards. The ground was a desolation of overlapping shell holes, many of them immense and brimming with water. Among these waterlogged craters lay the bodies of fallen soldiers. A few days later, faced with no alternative, we were forced to draw water from those very shell holes to make tea."

These words paint a vivid and sombre picture of the unrelenting hardships faced by Hugh and his comrades. Amid such unimaginable conditions, their resolve and determination to continue their vital work stand as a testament to their courage and endurance.

On October 8, 1917, Hugh's service on the frontlines came to a devastating turn when he was shelled with mustard gas. The injuries he sustained were severe, forcing his evacuation to a

hospital in England. Despite the care he received, the effects of the gas left him gravely unwell and unable to continue serving.

Deemed unfit for military service, Hugh was sent back to New Zealand to recover from his injuries. On February 18, 1919, he was formally discharged from duty with the somber notation: *“No longer physically fit for war service on account of wounds (gas poisoning) received in action.”*

After formally discharging from the Army, he again served, rising through the ranks. He first served as a Captain in the New Zealand Pay Corps, demonstrating exceptional diligence and professionalism. In September 1935, Hugh was among the first to transfer from the Army to the New Zealand Air Force when it was established. He was granted a commission in the Equipment Branch of the Regular Air Force, marking the beginning of a distinguished career that would leave an indelible mark on the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

From 1938, as the commanding officer of No. 1 Equipment Depot, he carried the responsibility of managing and overseeing the vast majority of equipment entering New Zealand for the RNZAF. Through his capable leadership and tireless dedication, he played a pivotal role in ensuring the preparedness and efficiency of the force, supporting the nation’s defence efforts with steadfast resolve.

In 1949 Hugh was awarded an OBE in the New Years Honours announcement.

Hugh demonstrated exceptional spirit and efficiency in performing his demanding duties, all the more remarkable given his ongoing battle with physical disability and pain.

Hugh passed away on July 3rd, 1966, at the age of 72, after a distinguished and successful career with the New Zealand Engineers and the Royal New Zealand Air Force. He now rests peacefully at Purewa Cemetery and Crematorium in Auckland, Block Z, Row 8, Plot 78.

RTIP Hugh

Thank you for your service

E kore e warewaretia

Will never forget