

Henry John LAURENT, VC

2nd Battalion, NZ Rifle Brigade

'Harry' Laurent was born in 1895 at Tarata in the Taranaki. He attended Hawera District High School before leaving to work in a cheese making factory. When war broke out in 1914, Laurent joined the NZEF and was sent first to Egypt and from there to France to serve with the NZ Rifle Brigade.

During the fighting in France, Laurent showed great leadership and was promoted to Sergeant. During the Allied advance towards the end of the war, the New Zealanders came up against a strong German position at Gouzeaucourt Wood. On 12 September 1918 during confused attacks on this objective, Sergeant Laurent was sent out with a twelve-man patrol to probe the enemy defences. Finding a heavily fortified trench system, he immediately attacked. After hand-to-hand fighting the twelve Kiwis killed thirty of the enemy, captured the trench and took 112 enemy soldiers prisoner. When the Germans counter attacked, Laurent managed to retreat in good order, keeping his prisoners under control and fighting a rearguard action. *"The success of this daring venture was due to Sergeant Laurent's gallantry and enterprise."* This rather incredible action resulted in the award of the Victoria Cross to Sergeant Laurent.



After the war, Laurent was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant before leaving the Army. While working for an engineering firm in 1921, he married Ethel Homewood. At the beginning of WW II he was recalled for service in local defence and was appointed a Major in the Home Guard. He served throughout the war in a variety of appointments including commanding the Hawera Area Defence Unit. Lieutenant Colonel Laurent finally retired from the army in 1949 and died in Hastings in 1987 aged 92.

