

Obituary: Lorenz (Bob) Meuli

The Wanganui Chronicle

Friday 6 September 1918

News came to Mr Nicholas Meuli yesterday, of the death in action of his son, Lorenz (or "Bob" as he was known to friends in Wanganui). He left New Zealand in October 1916, as a sergeant with the 18th Reinforcements, and on arrival at Sling he was stationed there for instructional purposes. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant-major, and when the last news was received from him in France he was expecting to return to England for a commission. His many friends will be sorry to hear of his demise. As a prominent representative of Rugby football and in the commercial world, "Bob" was exceedingly popular. In business he had a good future before him. He was the second son of Mr Nicholas Meuli. The youngest (Fred) was at Gallipoli, and has returned to New Zealand. The eldest son, Mr John Meuli, goes into camp in January. Whilst on service in England Bob met and married Margaret May Moore, second daughter of Mr and Mrs A.J. Moore of Acryse (near Folkestone), England. The couple married on 13 November 1917.

Tribute to Bob Meuli

Captain D. W. McClurg, of C. Company, 4th Battalion, N.Z. Rifle Brigade, pays a warm tribute to the late Company Sergeant Major "Bob" Meuli. Writing to his widow from "Somewhere in France", Captain McClurg says: *"Dear Mrs Meuli – It is with a sore heart that I drop you a few lines about your soldier husband, Bob Meuli, for I know well of the great love and understanding that existed between you two, and by the depth of my own loss of a comrade and friend I can measure in some degree your much greater loss of lover and husband. Bob has been with me in my company as my Company Sergeant-Major ever since he arrived in this battalion, and had fulfilled his duties so well that within a few days he would have been leaving for a cadet unit in England with a view to taking up a commission. On the morning of the 21st our Company had made an attack successfully, and other units in their turn having gone ahead of us we were resting, Company No. 2 being in a dugout in the side of a hill. After tea I was talking to Bob when I received a call to the telephone. I had hardly moved*

away ten yards when a shell landed just where I had been standing, killing Bob and wounding four others of my Company headquarters. But for the call on the phone I would also have suffered. His comrades reverently laid him to rest in a grave nearby and I had the Padre come up and bury him and read the service. His comrades have made him a wooden cross and I am sending one of my men (an artist), to make a sketch of his grave and of the place where he was killed; for I think that you would value them. To close, Mrs Meuli, all Bob's comrades, N.C.O.'s and men wish me to convey to you our heartfelt sympathy with you in your loss, in which we all share, though of course in a minor degree to yours, for one of the whitest and truest men it has been our pleasure to work with during this military life".

Obituary: Wilfred Meuli 1891-1916

Hawera Star

Wednesday 6th December, 1916

In the course of a letter received by Mr and Mrs J. Meuli of Manaia, from Captain Harston, he writes of their late son, Wilfred. "It is with feelings of deep grief that I write to offer you the deepest sympathy of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of this Company in your sad bereavement.

"He died as he would wish to die, leading his men, and they are full of stories of his bravery in the fight. He was killed instantaneously, and had no time to suffer pain.

"He was a very smart and able officer, and took great care of his men, wherever they were – a care well repaid when they went into the attack. He was the same in the trenches and during any bombardment; he was always up and down along his men, cheering and encouraging them, and he is an enormous loss to the Company. I am the more pleased to be able to tell you all this, because I know of some of the things said in New Zealand by a certain class of people before he came away. Nothing could have been more contemptible, but I am thankful to say that he did not ever let it worry him.*

Meuli Family

"In conclusion, let me again assure you of our deepest sympathy, and of our own loss of a staunch friend and a gallant officer".

***Note:** during WWI there was a strong undercurrent of suspicion directed at German-speaking people including Swiss-German migrants because their loyalty to "King and Country" was questionable in the opinion of some people. In some parts of New Zealand the homes and businesses of German immigrants were vandalized and they suffered verbal harassment at times. This carried over in an antagonism to anything German. The British Royal family changed its name to Windsor and local butchers who prior to the war advertised "German sausage" products immediately re-named these as "Belgian" sausage. In South Taranaki anti-German feeling extended towards German-speaking migrants and it appears the South Taranaki Meulis also suffered from this hostility towards them by a few people within the community. Hence the reference in the above tribute to criticism of Wilfred Meuli that he would not make a good soldier.

Tributes to Wilfred Meuli

Our Manaia correspondent [of the *Hawera Star*] writes: The late Lieutenant Wilfred Meuli, who gave his life for King and country, was a Manaia boy whose memory will long be cherished in Taranaki. The following extracts from letters written by his comrades testify to the way he was loved and deserved to be loved, how brave he was, and how rich in all the nobler qualities of manhood.

Private Reg Lynskey wrote: *"Poor Chick Meuli was killed on the second day of our advance, Saturday, September 16th. He was in a German trench they had just taken. A German machine gun was out in front playing havoc with our men, so Chick had one of our machine guns brought up to put it out of action, which it eventually did; but not before a bullet from the German gun had got Chick. He was shot through the head, and died instantly. It was hard luck for him. He made a great officer, and was one of the bravest, and his men thought the world of him. Most of the Manaia people thought he would make a poor soldier. They were wrong – very much wrong. So when Chick's name is mentioned, please tell them from me that he was the bravest and best*

liked of our officers". [Note: the reference to Wilfred perhaps being a poor soldier came about because of concerns held in South Taranaki by some people that Swiss-German migrants (and their children) could have pro-German sympathies].

The following is an extract from a letter written by Lieutenant P. J. O'Dowd: *"As you will have heard, Lieutenant W. Meuli was killed. From information I was able to gather from those of his Company and his fellow officers he was all that a good soldier should be. He was first shot through the arm, and shortly after, declining to retire, went over in the charge and was killed, shot through the head. The men of his platoon admired and loved him for his brave and fearless nature"*.

Writing after the great advance, Private P. Morris, of Manaia, sends further details of the circumstances of Lieutenant Meuli's death. He was in Lieutenant Meuli's Company and he was with him when he fell. He says: *"Lieutenant Meuli was on the parapet before us. He was just going up and down to tell his men to be ready and when the time came he called 'Hop out, boys', and did not lose any time. After we had gone about 30 yards he called. 'Lie down flat'. It was pretty hot at the time. He got into the German trench ahead of me a little. He was killed when I got there, and three more alongside of him. Mr Meuli was shot through the arm earlier when going across, but as he was a brave man, he went straight on till he reached his objective. He was a good man with us. When we were on the fire step that morning he said: 'Look out, boys; the Germans are coming.' But we didn't mind, for we were ready for them, and they soon went back with New Zealanders after them." In conclusion, Private Morris paid Mr Meuli a great tribute, perhaps unconsciously, when he added, quite simply: "He did his very best. I can say that for him, not only that he was a good all round man, all through from the start. I was under him five months and ought to know something about him and what I have said, it's true. All the boys are very sorry". He adds: "He is buried just behind Flers, and a few more of our boys with him, each with his name on the grave. Everything is tidy and neat".*

The whole of the letter spells truth and sincerity. The writer evidently writes just as he thinks and feels.