

= Leslie Andrew =

Brigadier Leslie Wilton Andrew VC DSO ( 23 March 1897 ? 8 January 1969 ) was a senior officer in the New Zealand Military Forces and a recipient of the Victoria Cross , the highest award of the British Commonwealth for gallantry " in the face of the enemy " . He received the decoration for his actions during the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917 .

Born in 1897 , Andrew joined the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in 1915 , having gained military experience while serving with the Territorial Force . He served on the Western Front from September 1916 to early 1918 , and ended the war as a commissioned officer in England . He remained in the military after the cessation of hostilities , and joined the New Zealand Staff Corps . He held staff and administrative positions in New Zealand and , while on an officer exchange program , British India .

Following the outbreak of the Second World War , Andrew was appointed commander of the 22nd Battalion , which he led during the Battles of Greece , Crete and the early part of the North African Campaign . For a short period in late 1941 he commanded an infantry brigade of the 2nd New Zealand Division , and received the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership . He returned to New Zealand in 1942 and commanded the Wellington Fortress Area for the remainder of the war . He retired from the military in 1952 with the rank of brigadier , and died in 1969 aged 71 .

= = Early life = =

Leslie Andrew was born on 23 March 1897 in Ashhurst in the Manawatu region of New Zealand , the son of a local school headmaster . He grew up in Wanganui , where his father had moved his family having taken up a position in the area , and was educated at Wanganui Collegiate School . After leaving school he was employed by the New Zealand Railways Department as a clerk . He participated in the cadet program while at school , and later joined the Territorial Force . By 1915 , he had been promoted to sergeant and had sat the necessary exams to become a commissioned officer in the Territorials .

= = Military career = =

= = = First World War = = =

Andrew volunteered for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force ( NZEF ) in October 1915 . Because only men between the ages of 19 and 45 were required to register for service with the NZEF , he falsified his age to ensure that he would be eligible for duty overseas . A member of the 12th Reinforcements , he embarked for the Western Front via Egypt on 1 May 1916 . In France , he was posted to B Company , Wellington Infantry Battalion with the rank of private .

Andrew 's arrival at the front coincided with the start of the Somme Offensive . He participated in the Battle of Flers @-@ Courcellette , which began on 15 September , and was wounded . Promoted to corporal in January 1917 , he took part in the Battle of Messines the following June .

During the early phase of the Battle of Passchendaele , Andrew 's battalion was engaged in fighting around the village of La Basseville , a few kilometres southwest of Messines . Originally captured by the New Zealanders prior to the battle on 26 July , the village had been re @-@ taken by the Germans the next day . Under cover of an artillery barrage , the Wellingtons began an advance towards the village . Andrew was tasked with leading two sections to destroy a machine @-@ gun post . During the advance , he noticed another machine @-@ gun post that was holding up the advance of another platoon . On his own initiative , he promptly diverted his force and removed the newly spotted threat with a flanking attack . He then continued with his men to his original objective . Braving continuous gunfire , he and his men captured the machine @-@ gun post . While most of his men withdrew with the gun , he and another man continued to scout further forward . Coming across another machine @-@ gun post , the two men destroyed it before returning to their lines with

useful information on the increasing numbers of Germans in the area .

It was for his leadership and bravery during these actions that Andrew was awarded the Victoria Cross ( VC ) at the age of 20 . The citation read as follows :

For most conspicuous bravery when in charge of a small party in an attack on the enemy 's position . His objective was a machine @-@ gun post which had been located in an isolated building . On leading his men forward he encountered unexpectedly a machine @-@ gun post which was holding up the advance of another company ; he immediately attacked , capturing the machine gun and killing several of the crew . He then continued the attack on the machine gun post which had been his original objective . He displayed great skill and determination in his disposition , finally capturing the post , killing several of the enemy and putting the remainder to flight . Cpl. Andrew 's conduct throughout was unexampled for cool daring , initiative , and fine leadership , and his magnificent example was a great stimulant to his comrades .

Andrew was promoted to sergeant the day after his VC @-@ winning action . He continued to serve on the front until early 1918 , when he was sent to England for officer training . He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in March 1918 , but remained in England until the end of the war .

= = = Interwar period = = =

While in England , Andrew met Bessie Ball , of Nottingham , and they were married on 12 November 1918 . The couple had five children although one died in infancy . Upon discharge from the NZEF in August 1919 , he joined the New Zealand Staff Corps and served in a number of administrative positions for the next several years . From 1927 to 1929 he served with the Highland Light Infantry in British India on an officer exchange program . On his return to New Zealand he was appointed adjutant of the 1st Wellington Regiment . In 1937 , having been promoted to captain , he commanded the New Zealand contingent sent to London for the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth .

= = = Second World War = = =

Following the outbreak of the Second World War , Andrew was seconded to the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force . In early 1940 , he was appointed commander of 22nd Battalion , then forming at Trentham Military Camp near Wellington . He trained his new command hard , and quickly earned the nickname of February due to his habit of issuing 28 @-@ day detentions for any breaches in discipline .

The battalion embarked for England in May 1940 as part of 5th Infantry Brigade , 2nd New Zealand Division . Arriving in June , it spent the remainder of the year on garrison duties in the south of England . In March 1941 it travelled for Egypt and then onto Greece . Andrew led the battalion through the subsequent Battle of Greece , during which it saw little action , and the Battle of Crete .

In Crete , the battalion was tasked with the defence of Maleme airfield and the overlooking hill , Point 107 . Andrew was ordered to maintain control of his positions " at all costs " . Forced to disperse the companies of his battalion widely to cover his positions , he lost contact with most of his units after German paratroopers began landing in the area on 20 May . Failing to receive any support from his brigade commander following a request for assistance , and fearing most of his command overrun after a failed counterattack by his small reserve , he withdrew his remaining units . As it happened , most of his forward companies remained intact and were subsequently able to withdraw themselves after finding they had been abandoned . Andrew was criticised for his withdrawal , which led to the loss of Maleme airfield . This was a significant factor in allowing the German forces to become established on Crete . He and the surviving elements of his battalion were later evacuated from Crete .

Despite the setback of Crete , Andrew remained as commander of 22nd Battalion during the early phases of the North African Campaign . At one stage he was temporary commander of 5th Infantry Brigade when its nominal commander , Brigadier James Hargest , was captured in late November

1941 . Andrew was awarded with the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership of the brigade , which had to deal with repeated attacks by German forces in early December . He relinquished command of 22nd Battalion on 3 February 1942 , and returned to New Zealand . He was promoted to full colonel and commanded the Wellington Fortress Area for the rest of the war .

= = Later life = =

Andrew commanded the New Zealand contingent for the 1946 Victory Parade in London , and the following year attended the Imperial Defence College . He was promoted to brigadier in 1948 and appointed commander of the Central Military District . He remained in this capacity until his retirement from the military in 1952 . Andrew was later invited to run for Parliament but declined . He died on 8 January 1969 , aged 71 . He was buried with full military honours in a ceremony at Levin RSA Cemetery , in Levin .

= = Victoria Cross = =

Andrew 's VC was displayed at the QEII Army Memorial Museum , Waiouru , New Zealand . On 2 December 2007 it was one of nine Victoria Crosses that were among a hundred medals stolen from the museum . On 16 February 2008 , New Zealand Police announced all the medals had been recovered as a result of a NZ \$ 300 @ , @ 000 reward offered by Michael Ashcroft and Tom Sturgess .