



Anzac Day – William John (Jack) Lyon MP

Parliamentary Information Service



PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE
Te Ratonga Whare Pāremata

Members of Parliament who served overseas in WWII

Allen, J.M. (National, Hauraki) †

Grigg, A.N. (National, Mid-Canterbury) †

Hargest, J. (National, Awarua) †

Hultquist, A.G. (Labour, Bay of Plenty) †

Lyon, W.J. (Labour, Waitemata) †

Macdonald, T.L. (National, Matakura)

Macfarlane, R.M. (Labour, Christchurch South)

Moncur, A.F. (Labour, Rotorua)

Skinner, C.F. (Labour, Motueka)

Of the nine members of Parliament who served overseas during the Second World War, five did not return home. Three of these five men died in November 1941: Gordon Hultquist (MP for Bay of Plenty), Jack Allen (MP for Hauraki), and Arthur Grigg (MP for Mid-Canterbury). At the opening of Parliament, a month later, the House paid tribute to their service. The speeches concluded with Fred Frost (MP for New Plymouth) stating:

The nation to-day is face to face with its gravest crisis, and it seemed to me, as I listened to the tributes paid to our fellow-members, that it is appropriate that so great a sacrifice should have been made by honourable members of this House. We are the people who determine the destinies of the nation in peace and in war, and therefore it is right that, when great trials fall upon the nation, those who legislate for it should be in the forefront of the tribulation. I am sure that is the desire of the New Zealand Parliament in particular—not to ask anything of the people which Parliament is not willing to undertake itself. In these gallant comrades whom we have honoured today, and to whose loved ones we have given our sympathy, we have seen exemplified that spirit of true democracy whereby Parliament shares with the people the trials and the sorrows which they are called upon to face. Whatever may be the outcome—and the outcome must be the triumph of things we believe in – we have before us, in the memory and the work and example of these fallen comrades of House, an inspiration to go on and maintain the things for which they lived and for which they died.

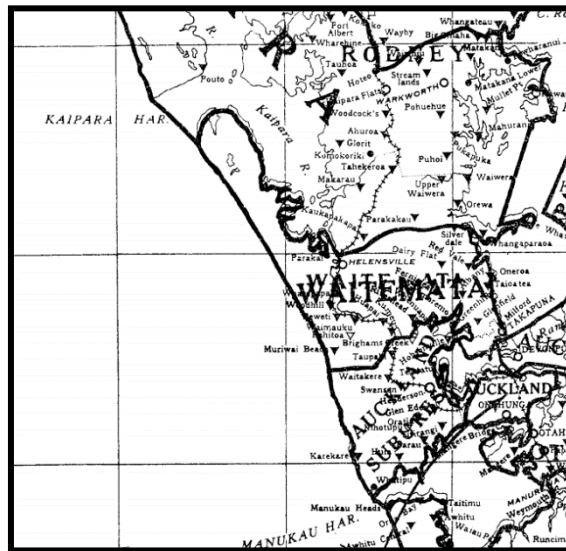
William John (Jack) Lyon (Labour, Waitemata)

Jack Lyon emigrated from England to New Zealand in 1927, having served as an officer in the Royal Sussex Regiment in the First World War (he enlisted at 17 years of age).¹ He became MP for Waitemata in November 1935 and retained this seat for Labour at the next general election in 1938.²



Four veterans of the last war again sail on active service. From left, standing: Captain R. W. Dunbar, Battalion Sergeant-Major H. R. Moore, Lieutenant J. A. Halliv, Gantam W. J. Lyon, M.P.

Auckland Weekly News, 21 February 1940.
[Lyon is standing on the right]



Waitemata electorate in 1939.

Lyon served as Captain in the 18th Infantry Battalion. Following training at camps in Hopuhopu and Papakura, the battalion left Wellington in January 1940 with the First Echelon, 2 New Zealand Expeditionary Force on the *Orion*. It disembarked at Port Tewfik, Egypt and then proceeded to Maadi Camp south of Cairo.

In March 1941, the 18th was sent to Greece becoming the first New Zealand battalion to arrive at the [Aliakmon River](#) line.³ After the withdrawal from Greece, the bulk of the New Zealand Division was sent to Crete. It was here that Lyon was hit by a bullet in the neck on 26 May 1941, moments after rallying his men, calling out, "Come on lads, we're going forward." He was the first MP to die on active service in World War Two.⁴

Following his death, MPs in the House paid tribute to his service and memory.

¹ Death in action. Captain W.J. Lyon Member for Waitemata. Service in last war. New Zealand Herald, 6 June 1941. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410606.2.111.2>; William John Lyon. Online Cenotaph. <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C27701>; Death in action. New Zealand Herald, 6 June 1941, p.9. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410606.2.111.2>

² Member Information System. Parliamentary Library.

³ W.D. Dawson, *18 Battalion and Armoured Regiment*

⁴ 18 Battalion and Armoured Regiment. In: The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945. <https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2-18Ba-c11.html>; Come on lads: Captain J. Lyon's last words. Wanganui Chronicle, 18 September 1941, p.6. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WC19410918.2.77>

Union Jack Drapes Captain Lyon's Seat

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WELLINGTON, This Day.

A feature of the opening of this portion of the session of Parliament was the large number of questions asked by members.

When the House met yesterday afternoon the desk occupied by Captain W. J. Lyon (Govt. member for Waitemata), who was killed in action recently, was draped with the Union Jack on which rested a laurel wreath bearing an appropriate inscription from his colleagues.

Northern Advocate, 11 June 1941.

CAPTAIN W. J. LYON, M.P.

TRIBUTE BY MR NASH

(P.A.) WELLINGTON, June 5.

"Captain Jack Lyon was one of the most lovable members of Parliament and was respected by all sections," said the Acting Prime Minister, Mr W. Nash, to-night. "His speeches were always clear, logical, well-informed, and won him the esteem of all who heard him.

"Interested in the Labour movement in England, he joined up with the Labour Party shortly after his arrival in the Dominion," Mr Nash said, "and after unsuccessfully contesting the Hawke's Bay seat he was elected for Waitemata in 1935, and had held the seat since. He will be missed greatly by all his friends, and his Parliamentary comrades will feel the break. His love for New Zealand and the British Commonwealth took him into the present

conflict immediately after the outbreak of war, and no man had a clearer conception of the issues at stake. The heartfelt sympathy of everyone will go out to his sorrowing wife and children."

Captain Lyon had represented Waitemata in the House since the election of 1935, in which he defeated the sitting member, Mr A. Harris. He was born in England, and enlisted in the Great War at the age of 17, serving for four years, after which he was for a time engaged at the War Office. He was a member of several public bodies in Hawke's Bay from 1919 to 1931, when he removed to Auckland.

Otago Daily Times, 6 June 1941. p.4.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19410606.2.40>



Captain W. J. Lyon,
M.P., of Auckland,
killed in action.

Lyon is also commemorated at:

- Athens Memorial, Phaleron War Cemetery, Athens, Greece
- Lyon Memorial Hall, Takapuna
- Takapuna War Memorials
- Memorial Drive, 1939-1945, Devonport Memorial Drive, Auckland
- Auckland War Memorial Museum, World War 2 Hall of Memories.

The seat left vacant by his death was won in July 1941 by Mary Dreaver for Labour. Mary was the third woman elected to the House of Representatives.⁵

⁵ Story: Dreaver, Mary Manson. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4d18/dreaver-mary-manson>