



Anzac Day – James Hargest MP

Parliamentary Information Service



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, Mātaura)

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.

James Hargest MP (National, Awarua electorate)

James Hargest, generally known as Jim or Jimmy, was born in Gore in 1891. After leaving school he joined his father, farming at Mandeville in Southland. He served in both World War I and II.

World War I

In World War I, Hargest was seriously wounded at Gallipoli in early August 1915. Once he had recovered, he joined the 1st Battalion of the Otago Infantry Regiment in France in July 1916. By the end of 1916, he had the temporary rank of major and had been awarded the Military Cross. By the end of the war, Hargest was Lieutenant-Colonel in command of the 2nd Battalion of the Otago Infantry Regiment.

He married Marie Wilkie, a theatre sister serving at the New Zealand military hospital at Brockenhurst, England in 1917.

“He was made a DSO, mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Croix de chevalier, Légion d'honneur. Marie Hargest was awarded the Royal Red Cross, second class, and mentioned in dispatches”.

They returned to New Zealand in May 1919, where they purchased a farm and Hargest was involved in the Territorial Force.¹ “They had three sons and a daughter – one son, Geoffrey Robert Hargest (447418) died of wounds in Italy in 1944 and another, Peter Miles Hargest (207275) died as the result of an accident while serving in Malaya nearly a decade later [in] 1952”.²

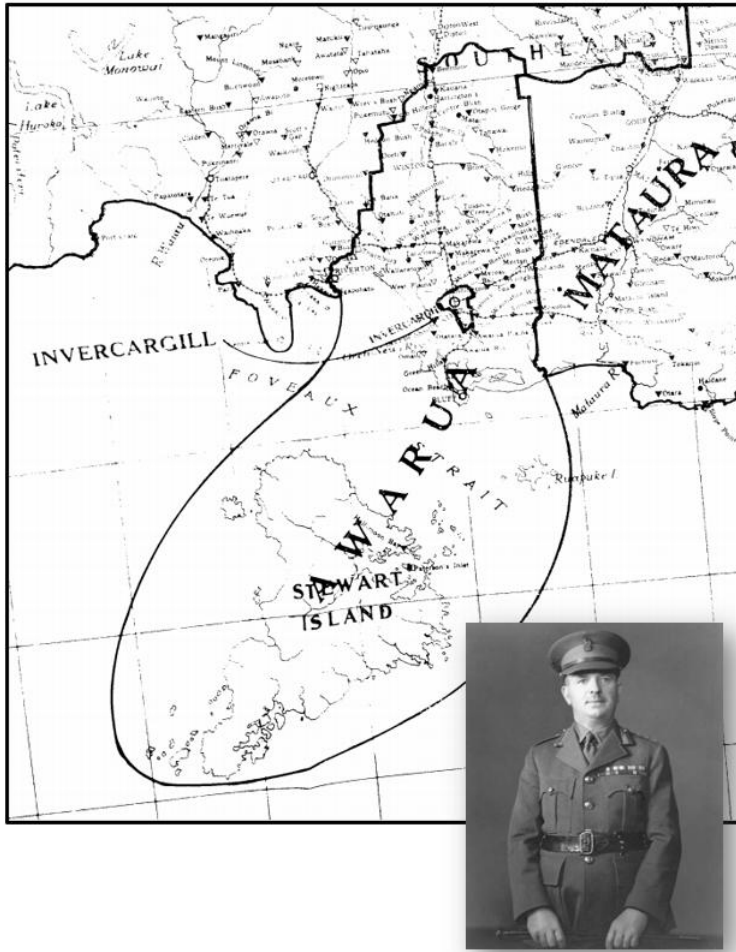
Member of Parliament

In 1931, Hargest took the Invercargill parliamentary seat for the coalition government, with a narrow majority. Four years later, for the 1935 election, he ran for the rural Southland seat of Awarua, which he held until his death.³

¹ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>

² Marie Henrietta Wilkie. Online Cenotaph. <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C35044>

³ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>



World War II

When the Second World War began in 1939, Hargest sought a senior post in the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

A medical board determined that he was fit only for service in New Zealand due to the continuing effects of shellshock from his service in WWI. However, Hargest asked Peter Fraser, the acting prime minister, to intervene and he was given command of the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade in March 1940.⁴ On 27 April 1940, troops of the Second Echelon—commanded by Hargest—paraded before Parliament and through the streets of Wellington.

In May 1940, Hargest was promoted to brigadier and sailed for Egypt but diverted to Britain in anticipation of a German invasion. By 3 March 1941, the bulk of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force were in the Middle East, and from 6-7 March, British troops, including most of 2 NZ Division, begin to arrive in Greece.⁵

Hargest and his brigade fought in the Greek campaign of April 1941, "... and he received a bar to the DSO and the Greek Military Cross (first class) for his services in Greece and Crete"⁶.

⁴ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>

⁵ Second World War – overview. Page 6 – Second World War timeline. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/second-world-war/timeline>

⁶ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>

However, a biography on Te Ara notes that, although he performed with more credit in the later stages of the battle for Crete, there were concerns about his performance in the early stages of the battle.

“Hargest was strangely inactive during the vital early stages of the battle for Crete and must bear a large measure of responsibility for the loss of Maleme airfield and thus, ultimately, for the loss of the island. He performed with more credit during the latter stages of the battle

Hargest was dissatisfied with the performance during the campaign of Major General Bernard Freyberg, commander of the New Zealand Division; when he returned to Egypt he criticised him during a private meeting with Prime Minister Fraser. Freyberg was hurt by Hargest's actions, but none the less addressed some of his concerns”.⁷

After evacuating to Egypt, the New Zealand Division took part in the campaign to relieve Tobruk, in Libya. Hargest was captured on 27 November 1941 and taken to a high-security camp for senior Allied officers in a castle near Florence in Italy.⁸

Escape and death

In March 1943, Hargest and five others (including another New Zealand brigadier, Reginald Miles) escaped by tunnelling under the walls of the castle. Hargest and Miles were the only ones from the group to reach Switzerland and both received bars to the DSO in recognition of their achievement in escaping. Hargest was later made a CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

Late in 1943 he travelled across occupied France and into Spain, assisted by the French Resistance. He then flew to England, where he wrote an account of his escape, *Farewell Campo* 12.⁹

“At his own suggestion, Hargest was appointed New Zealand's observer with the Allied armies preparing to invade France. He was attached to the British 50th Division, which landed in Normandy on D-Day. Hargest spent a great deal of time near the front line and wrote perceptive reports on the campaign. Wounded in June, Hargest was killed by shell fire on 12 August 1944.”¹⁰

Hargest is listed on a roll of honour for MPs who died while on active service with the New Zealand forces during the Second World War. See: <https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/features/parliamentarians-in-two-world-wars/>

⁷ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>

⁸ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>

⁹ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>

¹⁰ Story: Hargest, James. Te Ara. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h16/hargest-james>



Three key commanders of the Crete campaign confer at Helwan, Egypt, on 22 July 1941. Left to right: Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew, 22nd Battalion; Brigadier Hargest, 5th (NZ) Brigade; Major-General Freyberg, 2nd New Zealand Division and Creforce. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [/records/22343464](https://records/22343464).

Brig. Hargest Killed By Shell In Normandy

(P.A.) WELLINGTON, This Day.

"IT IS WITH THE DEEPEST SORROW THAT I HAVE TO ANNOUNCE THAT BRIGADIER JAMES HARGEST, M.P., HAS BEEN KILLED IN ACTION IN NORTHERN FRANCE," STATED THE PRIME MINISTER (HON. P. FRASER) LAST NIGHT.

"The news was conveyed to me in a personal message from General Sir Richard O'Connor, with whom Brigadier Hargest was serving, and with whom he was linked by ties of close personal friendship."

Mr Fraser intimated that tributes to Brigadier Hargest's memory would be paid when the House of Representatives resumed on Tuesday.

"It is with a very deep sense of regret and indeed with a heavy burden of sorrow that I have to make an announcement in regard to one of the members of this House—Brigadier Hargest, whom I mentioned only a few days ago as having been appointed to look after the interests of our prisoners-of-war when they reach Britain," said Mr Fraser.

The Prime Minister said that word was received last night by the Minister for Defence, announcing Brigadier Hargest's death, but not officially, and with a request that no public announcement should be made until confirmation was received from the War Office. Then word had come

from a Corps commander in Normandy, expressing regret at what had happened. Mr. Fraser said it was impossible to keep the news of her husband's death from Mrs. Hargest, and consequently it had been conveyed to her during the afternoon.

Excerpt from: Brig. Hargest killed by shell in Normandy. Northern Advocate, 19 August 1944, p.4. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19440819.2.35>