

Brothers in Arms - by Tessa Smallwood

Reference:

<http://www.armymuseum.co.nz/kiwis-at-war/voices-from-the-past/brothers-in-arms/>



The night had been a long one. They had ridden in the darkness of the desert landscape for 45 kilometres. They needed to rest and they needed water but there was a mission laid out ahead of them; a mission that would determine the fate of many. Some of the people beside whom they now rode would not make it through the day. That was a given. As the sun rose above the horizon ahead, the bold, golden green hills of their New Zealand must have seemed so very distant; so too their homes, families and former lives. Here, there was no Auckland or Wellington, no North Island or South, no hangi's on the beach. But there was community and this Anzac Division were no doubt brought closer by their shared memories of home.

Amongst the party were the 5th Reinforcements of the Wellington Mounted Rifles. They had been away from New Zealand for only 18 months, but this was no holiday and it must have felt more like a lifetime. Two brothers rode together that day; brothers who had also fought together and survived Gallipoli. This day however, was to be their last foray into battle. As the Turks began to bombard them at 09.30 that morning, their mother and father would have been preparing for bed, praying for their sons' return from the far side of the world. The older brother was called John Fairly Graham. He would have turned 27 in a week. He had brown hair and grey eyes and was 5ft 11' like his brother.



Before the war, John had worked at Rototahi station, where his family lived in Gisborne. His younger brother Thomas Robert, had been a shepherd. He was fair with blue eyes and was slightly broader across the chest than John. He was 24 years old. On the 13th of February 1915, they had waited in line to enlist together. Four months later, they sailed from Wellington. If they had looked back on the city's rugged shores that day, it would have been for the last time.

By 10am on the 9th January 1917, the Anzac Division began their attack on the Rafar Turkish garrison. Initially, the brothers' regiment stayed 10km back to watch for Ottoman reinforcements. At first, progress was slow but steady, but by midday, they were stuck 500 metres from the Redoubt. The Graham brothers moved in to help along with their Battalion. What followed was a 5 hour slog, but the New Zealand Mounted Rifles took the Redoubt sometime after 4.30pm. BY 6.30pm however, Ottoman Reinforcements had arrived and the Wellington Mounted Rifles withdrew. By 9.30pm eight of them had been killed. the younger of the brothers, Thomas, was amongst them. John had also been badly wounded and died the following day.



Back at the Rototahi station, their father John and mother Augusta were soon to receive the news that two of their three sons in active service had died. The third, Ronald, was only 21 and currently serving on the Western Front with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade. This family would not have had the burial funeral in which to say their last goodbyes to John and Thomas; their bodies were buried in the battlefields of Egypt. What they did receive were the medals that their sons had earned alongside a memorial plaque for both. These memorials were little consolation, no doubt, but they are symbols of the boys noble adventure, the Brothers in Arms. They are now treasured by the National Army Museum in their new Medal Repository.

Ronald, on the Western Front kept fighting. He had John's dark hair, and Thomas' blue eyes and he too suffered much on his own war-time adventure. After serving 2 years and 14 days, Ronald was discharged as "no longer physically fit for service on account of illnesses contracted while on active service." He recovered and lived on, on those rugged shores of Wellington until his death on the 10th May 1982.