

# The stories of war

CULTURE

**S**HIPPED to Gallipoli and the slaughterhouse of the Western Front. Hospitalised with battle-related ailments. Eventually barred from yet another war for being too old to fight. You can't say Gisborne hairdresser John Joseph Roberts didn't do his bit.

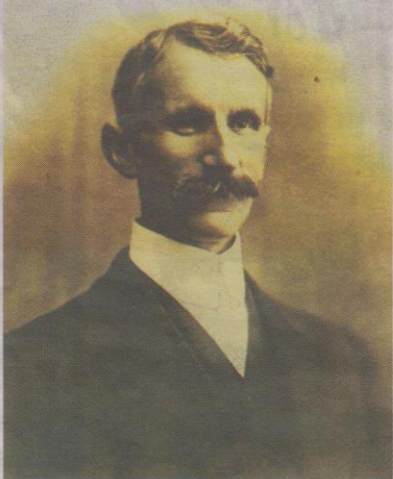
Roberts' story is so memorable it will be among those to be told when the National Army next week brings to Gisborne its travelling exhibition, Heartlanders: New Zealanders of the Great War.

Packed into shipping containers that also serve as exhibition space, the show evolves as it goes along so it is taking soldiers' "special stories back to the communities where their journey began".

According to museum marketing manager Nicola Bennett, it is heading this way "because of the large number of soldiers Gisborne contributed to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in World War One".

The Heartlanders stories are tales of both those who survived, and those who didn't.

Original film footage sourced from New Zealand and overseas, period music and



**ONE OF HEAVEN'S PEERS:** Among the stories to be told in the National Army Museum show is that of Chaplain William Grant (pictured), who left the Presbyterian Manse in Gisborne to become a heroic figure on Gallipoli. Grant was aged 56 in August, 1915 when he was the first New Zealand Chaplain killed in World War 1. Described by a fellow chaplain as "one of heaven's peers", he was reportedly tending to wounded Turk soldiers when shot by a member of a Turkish patrol. Picture supplied

"We're hoping Gisborne people will take advantage of this unique opportunity to learn the New Zealand story, and to see a 'snapshot' of our wonderful museum back in Waiouru."

Meanwhile, back to hairdresser John Roberts who, having been born in London in 1893, can't even have reached the age of 20 by the time he moved to New Zealand as a single young man.

In any case, he was well settled in Fox Street, Gisborne, before the then 10/1631 Private John Roberts enlisted with the Wellington Infantry Battalion in December, 1914.

It wasn't long before he was called to war: leaving Wellington aboard the Maunganui just two months later and travelling to Suez, Egypt, then to the outskirts of Cairo to begin training in earnest.

Along with the rest of the Wellington Battalion, on the evening of April 25, 1915 Roberts landed at Anzac Cove where they dug in and repelled Turkish counter-attacks.

Just over a week later an undisclosed ailment sent him to a hospital ship off

battle sounds — together with original artefacts from the museum collection — make up the bulk of the exhibition.

An interesting feature is an Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Digitisation Unit, says Bennett.

"This makes it easy for visitors to search the database for information on soldiers who served and also allows for documents and images to be scanned and uploaded," she says.

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## Gisborne soldier keen to fight

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the coast but he was back in time to take part in the August attack on Chunuk Bair.

And even though he was soon back on the hospital ship then to England — with a hernia related to wounds he received — he boomeranged back to Gallipoli in December, just before the final evacuation.

Promoted to Corporal then Sergeant, he served in Egypt and France before early 1919 when a case of scabies (possibly from his time in the trenches) saw him invalidated out of the army.

But even that wasn't enough for

Roberts who, after his return to New Zealand, moved to Whangarei to work as a salesman.

In January, 1941 the by then 41-year-old enlisted to serve in World War 2 and though discharged a year later due to his age, he served with the Home Guard for the duration of the war.

John Joseph Roberts' uniform is held at the Army Museum in Waiouru. Except for next week, when it will be brought "home" to be shown in Gisborne.

■ Heartland: NZers Of The Great War will be installed at Gisborne's Grey Street Carpark next Wednesday and Thursday (10am-6pm).