

WAR RECORDS AND LIFE STORY OF ROBERT FRASER GILLESPIE (KNOWN AS BOB)

Robert Fraser Gillespie 6/2631 Record No: 0044856: R no: R16786260: Series: 18805:



ROBERT F. GILLESPIE

Robert Fraser Gillespie was born on 7th May 1896 at Amuri, Hanmer Springs, Canterbury. His parents were William and Ann (nee Fraser) Gillespie. Bob had four older siblings, Ida, Hugh (died aged 16yrs), Duncan and Catherine (Effie) and one younger George. When Bob was born the family lived at Upper Waiau Station where his father was manager.

Bob began his schooling at the Upper Waiau Ferry School and continued at Central New Brighton from mid 1906, when his father purchased a dairy farm in Breezes Road, New Brighton. Bob enjoyed his school years, and he especially liked poetry and in later years wrote some of his own. He won numerous swimming medals while at New Brighton School. The races were held in the river not far from their Breezes Road home. The story goes that in one race Bob started heading the wrong way and on discovering his mistake turned around and still won the race. On leaving school Bob carried on the family tradition and became a shepherd in the South Canterbury area.

Bob enlisted on 17th April 1915, the same day as his brother Duncan Thomas 6/2630. At the time of enlistment he was shepherding at Tripp Station, Orari Gorge, Woodbury. His employer was Tripp Estate. He listed his father William, Breezes Road, Christchurch as next of kin.

Robert was 5ft 10 inches tall and weighed 150lbs, complexion fair, eyes grey, hair brown, teeth fair. He attested at Trentham on 17th April 1915 ranked Private, Unit 2nd Battalion Canterbury Regiment. At the time of enlistment Robert would have been 18 years and 11 months of age, but he had listed his birth year as 1895, instead of 1896. He married Emily (nee Brown) (who came to NZ in 1913 on the ship 'Ionic' from Broseley in shropshire) on the 9th of August 1915. He embarked on Troop ship No 27 SS Willochra from Wellington on the 14th August 1915, for Egypt.

Disembarked at Suez on the 19th September. He joined his battalion, Ismailia, on the 30th December 1915. He was in the Machine Gun section as a driver on 18th January 1916. Embarked for France 16th April 1916. Transferred to 2nd Battalion infantry 6th March 1917 and was appointed Lance Corporal on 18th March 1917. Wounded in France 13th June. (Messines?) Rejoined his unit on the 21st June 1917. (His brother Duncan Thomas was killed at Messines on the 7th June 1917). Robert was wounded in action 12th October 1917 at Passchendaele and that was the end of his active service. On the 19th October embarked for the Military hospital at Tooting Beck, London. After 6 months convalescing, on the 9th April 1918, he was attached to the 3rd Reserve Battalion Canterbury Regiment Sling camp. He was a physical training and bayonet fight instructor. He embarked for NZ on troop ship No 275 SS Port Hacking, from Liverpool on 4th July 1919. Arrived in NZ on 20th August 1919 and was discharged 17th September 1919 after 4 years and 7 days abroad. He was only 23 years of age. Medals awarded 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory medal. He is remembered on the Central New Brighton School Roll of Honour, along with his brother Duncan. The knee wound that saw the end of his active service, caused him to limp for the remainder of his life.

Bob began work again at Tripp Station. His daughter Ida Catherine Fern was born while he was overseas and on return three more children arrived in quick succession, Dora Avery Born 27th May 1920, Duncan William Arthur born 30/4/1921 and June Amelia Maisie born 12th June 1922. He had a small holding at Tripp Settlement and the family attended the Tripp Settlement School while he was still working for the Tripp Estate. He was for a time Chairman of the School Committee.

Following on he shifted to Albury Park, to work for Basil Shaw, a farm cadet who used to visit their home at Tripp Settlement. The family then moved to Rocky Point Hakataramea in the 1930's. Robert's brother George had been at Rocky Point and then Haka Station. Robert and his brother were very close and when George moved to Balfour in 1938 to manage Ben Callum Station, he saw

that a Manager was required for Glenure Estate, Balfour. He told Robert to apply for the job, and hence the move to Balfour. The Glenure homestead was a lovely two storied wooden house with a verandah across the front with great views across the Waimea plains. They spent many happy years there. He was a member of the RSA, (President for many years), Lumsden Lodge (Grand Master), was a JP and a Captain in the Home Guard. He was also approached to stand for Parliament, but declined. When Glenure Estate was broken up for returned soldiers after the WWII he went to manage 'Wilden', near Herriot. He then moved to 'Highbury' near Ranfurly as manager. He was a keen follower of rugby and loved horse racing. While at Highbury the Didham stables at Wingatui would send their horses to be ridden on the hill country and Robert and Amy would take them back before the racing season began.

From there he and Amy retired to 83 Ventry Street, Alexandra. Bob was a keen gardener and I remember his wonderful big onion patch and the lovely red tasty potatoes he grew. They made some great friends in Alexander, among them the Hobbs and the Marshalls and they enjoyed card evenings and both were very good lawn bowlers and competition took them all over the region. Their last residence was 23C Bringans Street and Amy lived there until her death in 1982.

Bob was a diabetic in later life and had to inject himself daily. Robert Fraser Gillespie died on the 20th of January 1978 at the age of 81 years, after spending the last 2 years of his life in 'Ripponburn' Home, Cromwell.

Military Information - Ministry of Defence

Personal details from his daughter June Amelia Maisie Whitehead and other family members

Put together by his granddaughters Clare Palliser and Hilary Coles, daughters of Duncan William Arthur Gillespie

(Our Grandfather was a lovely, kind and gentle man who loved life, his wife Amy (he called her Ma) and family dearly. Grandad had a good sense of humour and he related really well to young people. He once bought Kenny Stewart a pie and told him that when he was an All Black he could get him a ticket to a game. I don't know if he got the ticket, but Kenny did become an All black. He never spoke of his war experiences, but while staying with my grandparents in Alexandra I got to try on his army jacket and although I was only 21 at the time, it was a tight fit. He showed me all his medals and wound stripes. I really only heard him mention the Belgian mud, knee deep or worse in places. I know he carried in his wallet a letter written by his brother Duncan, as he showed it to me on my last visit while he was in 'Ripponburn' home Cromwell. (At that stage I didn't know that he was nearby when his brother Duncan was killed at Messines, it must have been heart breaking and very hard to bear) Clare



Robert Fraser Gillespie



Just a few lines as I only
 got these cards to night -
 + I thought I would give
 you one it is a transport
 wagon + its guard, I am
 the 3rd man in the 1st far off
 row but I think you
 can pick his ribs.

Duncan has gone into
 town to see Jean Kay
 I saw her the other
 night. at Henikony
 we both were there
 on Sat. night.

We are on active service
 now since this morning
 + are off on Sat. + are
 not sorry to get away
 from Trentons will miss
 I remain your little brother
 Bob.



FOR KING AND COUNTRY.

LANCE-CORPORAL R. F.
GILLESPIE.

Lance-Corporal Robert Fraser Gillespie (wounded), of Breeze's Road, New Brighton, is twenty-one years of age. He was born at the Upper Waiau, and



left with the Sixth Reinforcements. He was for a short time at Gallipoli immediately prior to the evacuation, and saw considerable service in France.

CORPORAL D. T. GILLESPIE

Below are letters written by Bob while on active service in Europe – typed copy of each letter below

I have not been to Blight yet
perhaps you do not count

France

29/10/16

Dear Ida, I received a letter
from you to day & also ^{also}
from Dad, they are the
first for a long while now
I will write to you long soon
so you ought to get them
at the same time. How
is Fannie I got a photo of
her today she is very fat
don't you think. You have
been having some visitors
lately I nearly forgot
I actually had a letter
from Eff the first since
I have been on A. Service
I have had a headache
ever since of course do
not show her this

as no doubt she does
had enough to think
of with out writing
to us. Poor Old Dad I
do not know where he is
in England perhaps I hope
he does not come back
as there is nothing to
look forward to out
here, I'll bet he has
seen all the scrapping
that he wants to as
he was all through the
hardest fighting & I
don't mind admitting I've
seen enough after coming
through the hot - Hell
do me & I don't greedy
Bill Cordy my mate at
Tripps got wounded
in Egypt & shell

shock also its a terrible
thing this shock no means
cant speak and no sense
or reason whatever but
of course one has got to
be very close to a bomb to
get that bad but I seen
men with it, of course
they are lucky in a way
that they were not blown
to pieces, sometimes there
is absolutely nothing of
a man left if a shell
gets him fair & the person
reads the ravine over the
shell hole of course
you will think this
awful but its nothing
for us everyday seen
on the — but we

are in a much quieter
place at present &
~~and~~ I think myself again
lucky to have a whole
skin. Remember me to
Mr Thomas & the boys &
the Hankinells I saw
at there when we came
out of the — & he was
all night a chap has
not much time to look
him up but I will do it
I expect George wants to
come away but keep
him away as long as
every you can as he
is better at home
Well Ida enough
this time I remain
Your loving brother
Frank

Letter from Robert to his sister Ida

At top it says I have not been to Blighty yet – perhaps you do not comprehend -England

France 29.10.16

Dear Ida, I received a letter from you today and also two from Dad. They are the first for a long while now. I will write to Dad tomorrow so you ought to get them at the same time. How is Fernie I got a photo of her today, she is very fat don't you think. You have been having some visitors lately, Oh? I nearly forgot I actually had a letter from Effie the first since I have been on A service. I have had a headache ever since, do not show her this as no doubt she has had enough to think of without writing to us. Poor old Dunc, I do not know where he is in England perhaps, I hope he does not come back as there is nothing to look forward to out here, I'll bet he has seen all the scrapping that he wants to as he was all through the hardest fighting, and I don't mind admitting it I've seen enough after coming through the lot – it will do me and I'm not greedy.

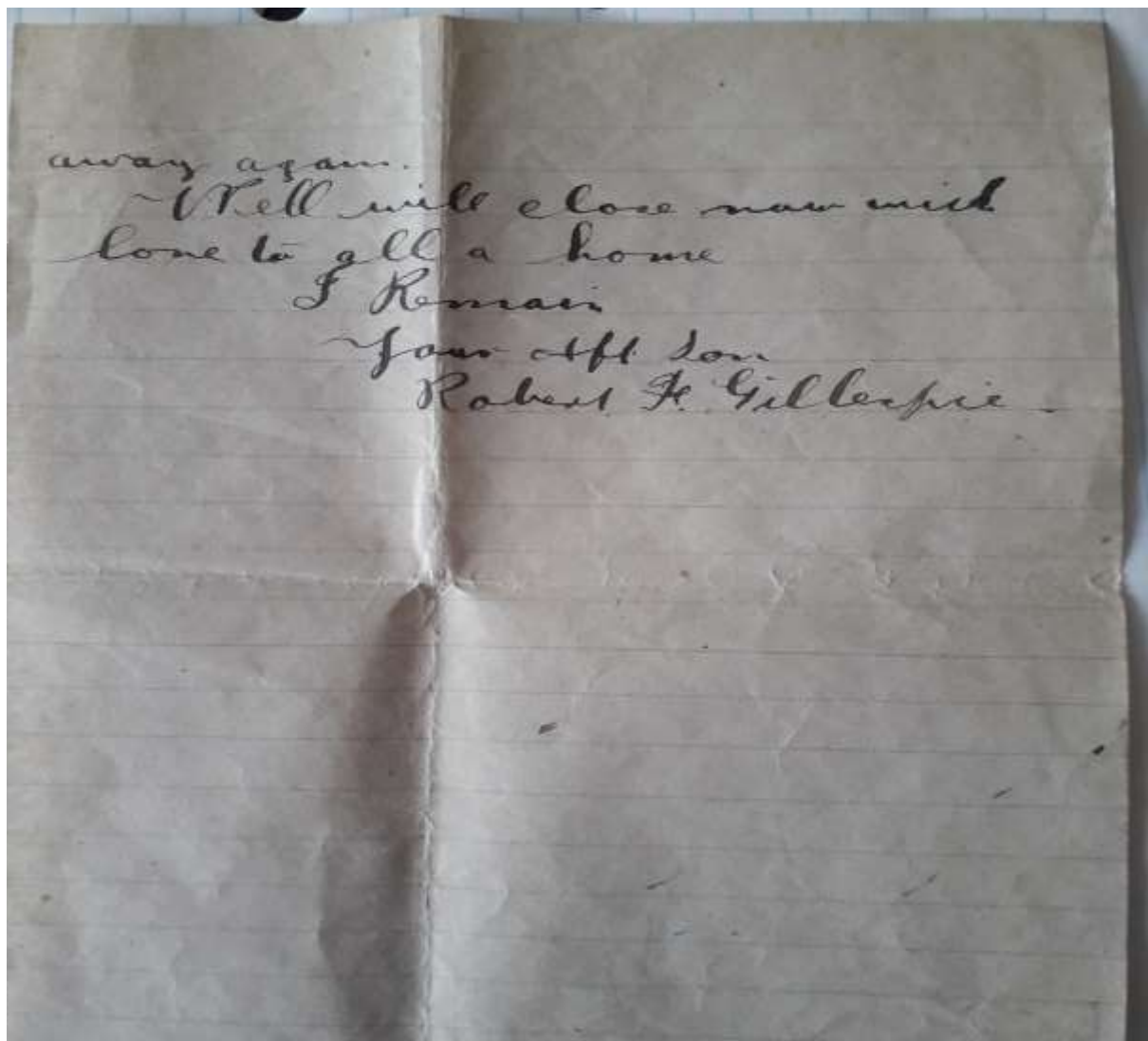
My mate Bill Cordy my mate at Tripp Settlement wounded in Egypt and shell shock also it's a terrible thing this shock no memory can't speak and no sense or reason whatever but of course one has got to be very close to a burst to get that bad but I've seen men with it, of course they are lucky in a way that they were not blown to pieces, sometimes there is absolutely nothing of a man left if a shell gets him fair and the parson reads the service over the shell hole. Of course you will think this awful but its nothing to us every day seen on the ----- but we are in a much quieter place at present and I think myself darn lucky to have a whole skin. Remember me to Mrs Thomas and the boys and the Parkwilles I saw Albert when we came out of the ----- and he was alright – a chap has not much time to look him up but I will ASAP. I expect George wants to come away, but keep him away as long as ever you can as he is better at home.

Well Ida enough this time and remain you loving brother Bob

France
30/6/16

Dear Father, I received your ever
welcome letter today, it
seems you have not been
getting my letters very
regular there must be a
leakage in the postal service
somewhere but it's hard to
say where it is. We have
been having some wet ~~and~~
weather lately, but we are
fairly well off in the way of
billets, & stables for our
horses. How is everybody at
home quite well I hope Amy
has been having a good holiday
but expect she will benefit by it.
So George is leaving Wilks. is
he, what is he going to do now
he will be having a good holiday

in the N. I. with Bill Paterson,
I would not mind a holiday
either, I have only had one whole
day to myself since I came off extended
leave, & that was when we got leave
to Cairo when we were at Moascar.
But as far as I am concerned I do
not want to see Cairo; or Egypt
again, I've seen all I want to see
there, but there is no doubt there
is places worth seeing, but it is
the horrible stagnant smell everywhere
you go that gets on your nerves.
Well I don't think there is much
more news this time except that
both Duncan & I are in the very
best of health & waiting for the
time to roll on when we start for
N. I. once again, & once ~~there~~ I
put my foot on Pig Island it
will take so pulling to get me



France 30/6/16

Dear Father, I received your ever welcome letter today, it seems you have not been getting my letters very regular there must be a leakage in the postal service somewhere but its hard to say where it is. We have been having some wet weather lately, but we are fairly well off in the way of billets, and stables for our horses. How is everybody at home quite well I hope Amy (Emily) has been having a good holiday but expect she will benefit by it.

So George is leaving Wilkes is he, what is he going to do now he will be having a good holiday in the NI with Bill Paterson, I would not mind a holiday either, I have only had one whole day to myself since I came off extended leave, and that was when we got leave to Cairo when we were at Moascar. But as far as I'm concerned I do not want to see Cairo; or Egypt again, I've seen all the S I want to see there, but there is no doubt there is places worth seeing, but it is the horrible stagnant smell everywhere you go that gets on your nerves.

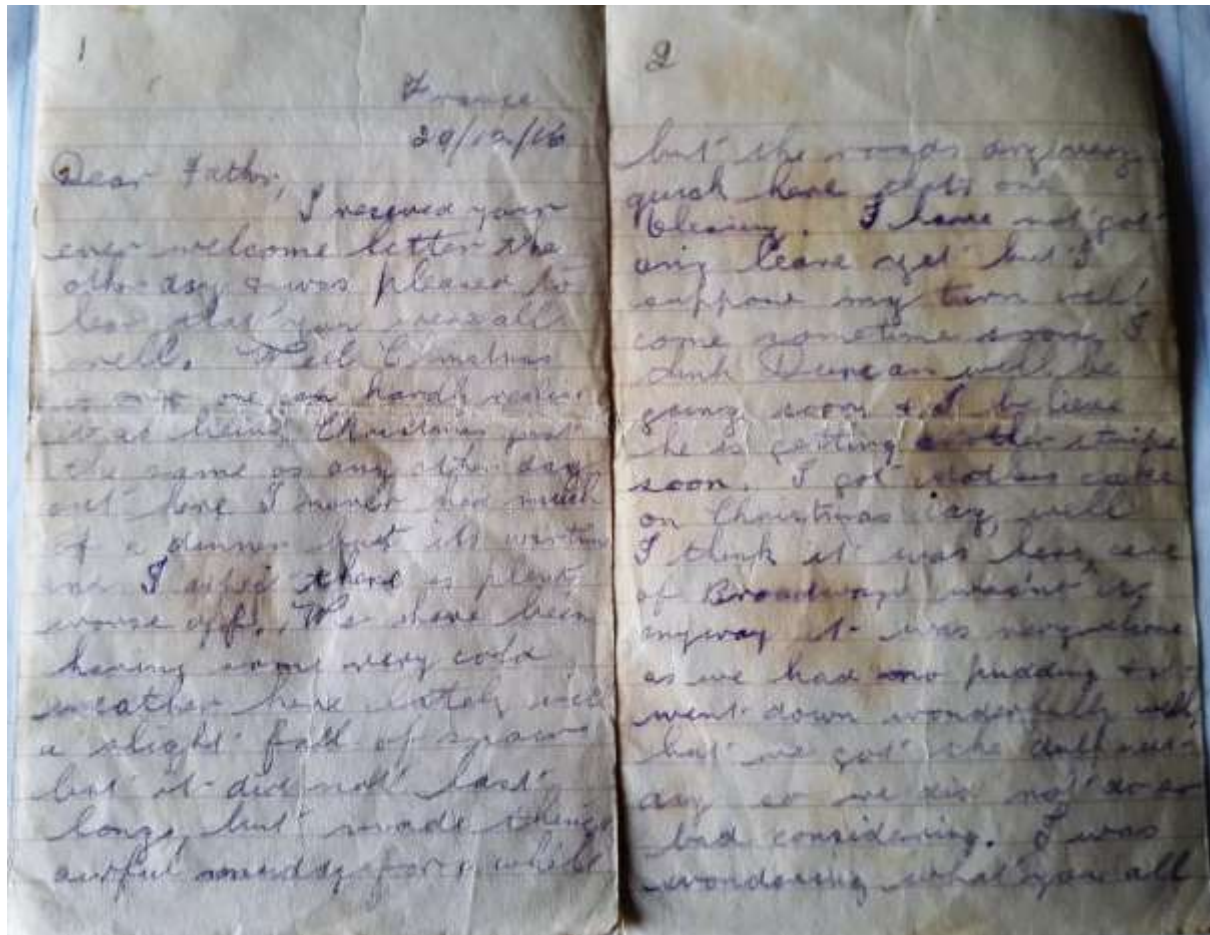
Well I don't think there is much more news this time except both Duncan and I are in the very best of health and waiting for the time to roll on when we start for NZ once again, and once I put my foot on pig island it will take no pulling to get me away again.

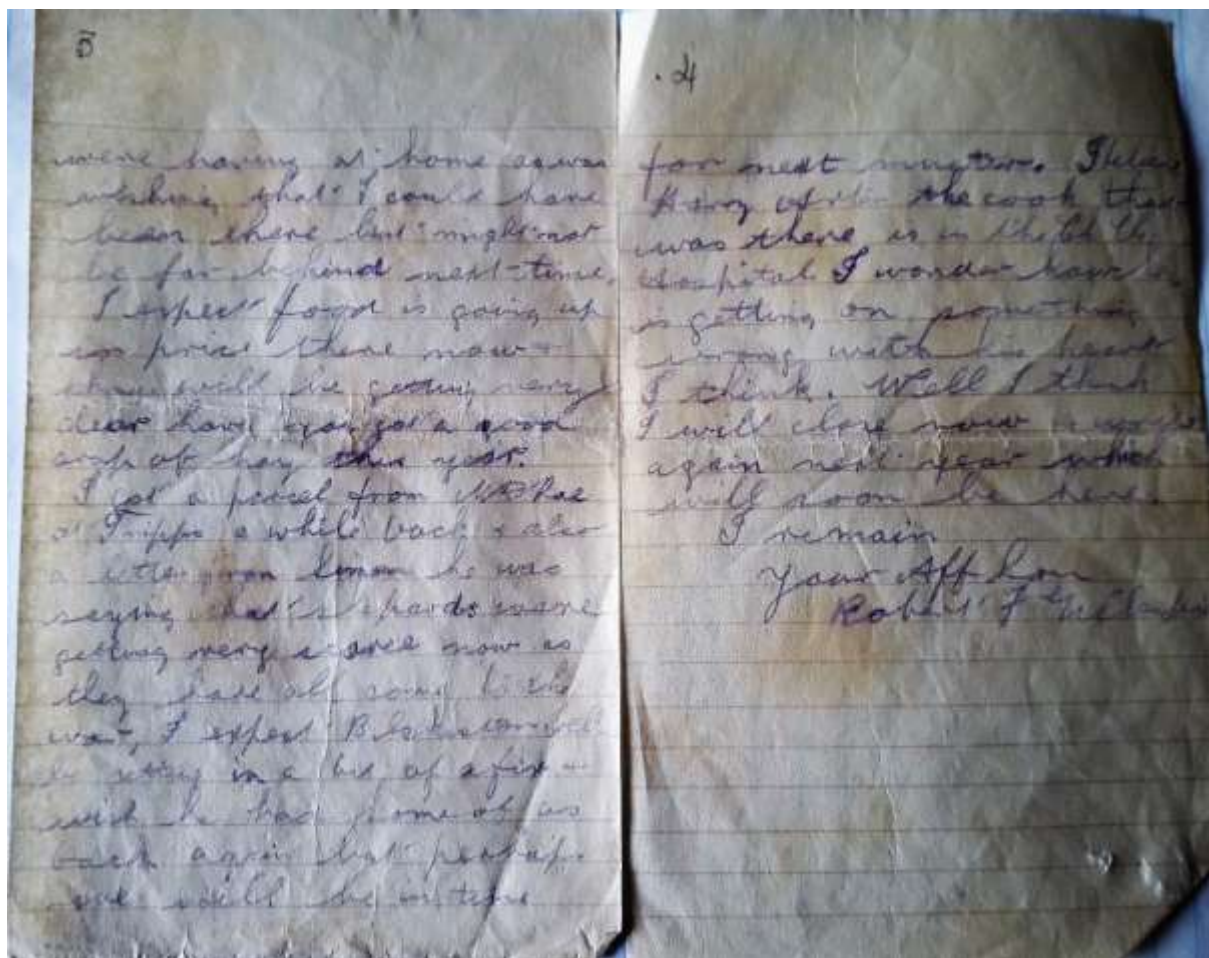
Well will close now with love to all at home

I remain

Your aff son

Robert F Gillespie





France 29.12.16

Dear Father, I received your ever welcome letter the other day and was pleased to hear that you are all well. Well Xmas is over one can hardly realize it as being Xmas just the same as any other day out here. I never had much of a dinner but its war time and I expect there is plenty worse off.

We have been having some very cold weather here lately with a slight fall of snow but it did not last long, but made things awful muddy for a while but the roads dry very quick here that's one blessing.

I have not got any leave yet but I suppose my turn will come sometime soon. I think Duncan will be going soon and I believe he is getting another stripe soon, I got Mothers cake on Xmas day, well I think it was hers, care of Broadways wasn't it, anyway it was very welcome as we had no pudding and it went down wonderfully well, but we got the duff next day so we did not do so bad considering. I was wondering what you all were having at home as was wishing I could have been there but might not be far behind next time. I expect food is going up in price there now and things will be getting very dear. Have you got a good crop of hay this year.

I got a parcel from McRae at Tripps a while back and also a letter from Simon he was saying that shepherds were getting very scarce now as they have all come to the war, I expect Blakiston will be getting in a bit of a fix and wish he had some of us back again but perhaps we will be in time for next muster. I believe Harry Arter (not sure of surname) the cook that was there is in the ChCh hospital I wonder how he is getting on something wrong with his heart I think. Well I think I will close now and write again next year which will soon be here.

I remain

Your aff son

Robert F Gillespie



Somewhere in France.

Feb 6 1917

Dear Mother,
I received your letter last night & was very pleased to get one as it was some time since I had heard from home. I mean went on leave to the hospital over there to undergo an operation to get the shot out of his head as his tin had used to hurt him and then he is lucky



Somewhere in France.

Feb 6 1917

beggar I think I expect he will be there for some time to come. I will be going to in a day or two but will write & tell you all about it when I get back. I will go to Scotland tomorrow if possible the place where you came from. It is very cold here now the snow has been on the ground for



Somewhere in France.

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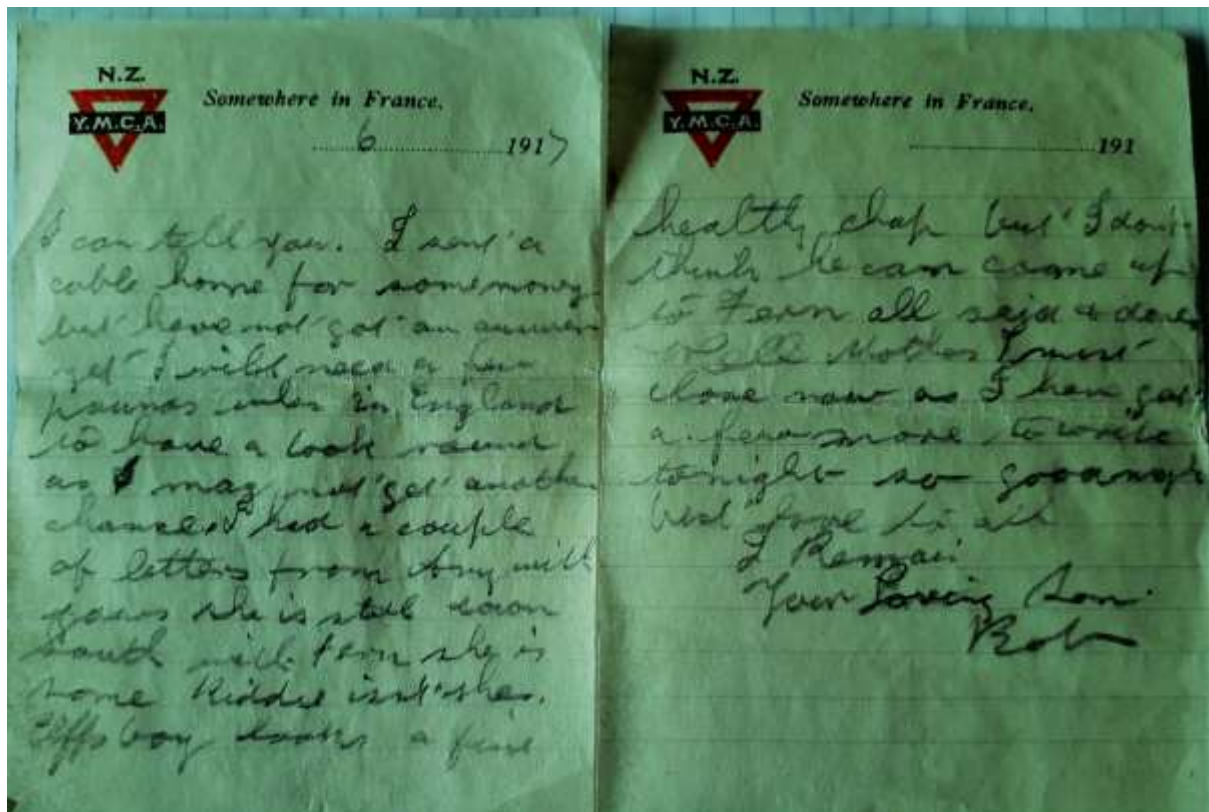
some considerable time & the ice is inches deep & affords plenty of skating for those who like it. I have several coats but the ice is very hard & I was sore in several places & after a few hours. We got out from the trench the little black with leather cases just like a pocket book by Jones



Somewhere in France.

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the Y.M.C.A. has done a lot for us chaps out here one cannot speak too highly for it. I never thought much of it once but it is really a blessing gave us hot tea, soup, or hot milk one place in the trenches with a cigarette & piece of cake thrown in for nothing and it was darkness

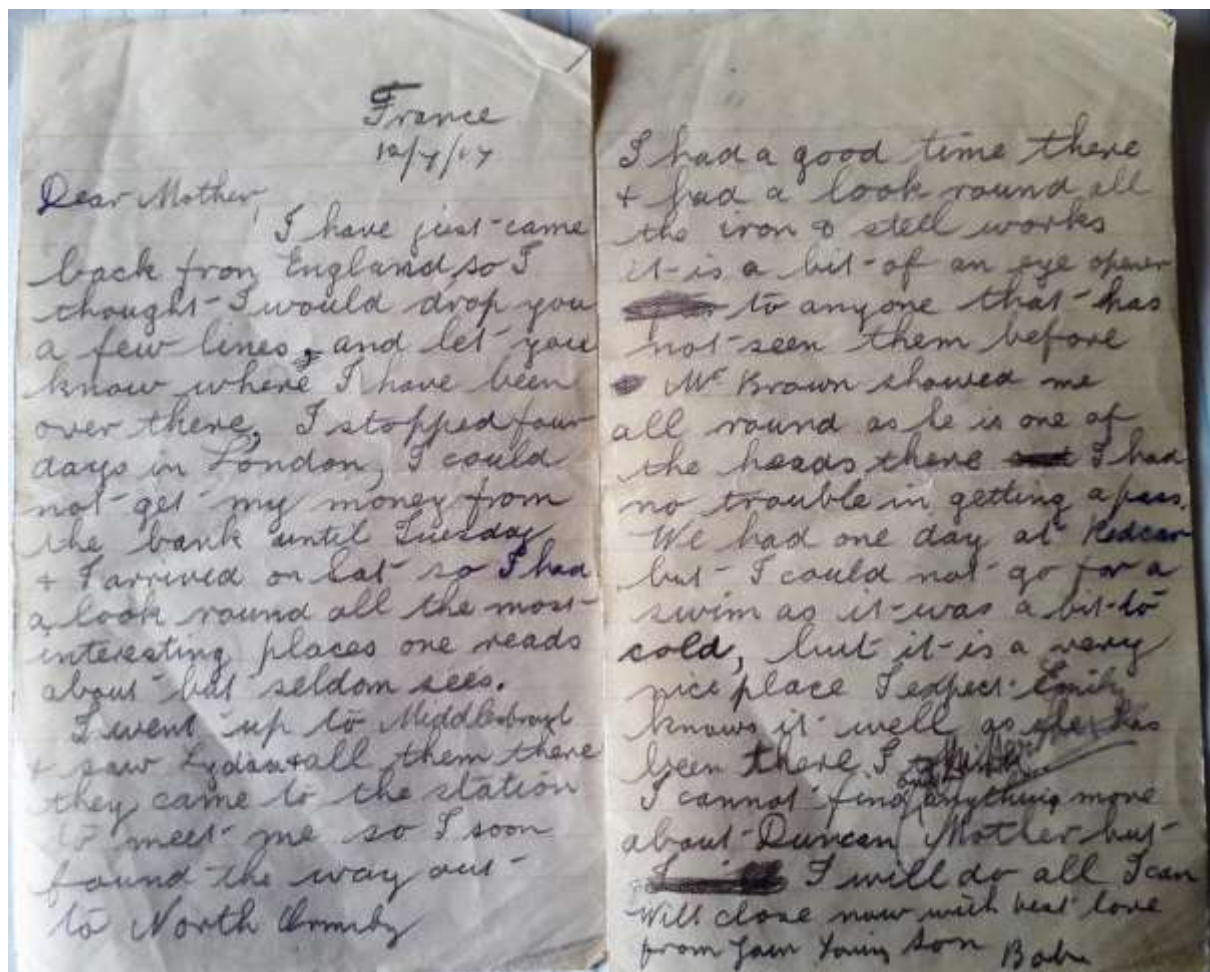


NZ YMCA Somewhere in France Notepaper
Feb 6 1917

Dear Mother, I received your letter lastnight and was very pleased to get one as it was sometime since I last heard from home. Duncan went on leave to Blighty but went into hospital over there to undergo an operation to get the shot out of his head as his tin hat used to hurt him with them in he is lucky beggar I think he will be there for some time to come. I will be going too in a day or two but will write and tell you all about it when I get back. I will go to Scotland Inverness if possible the place where you came from it is very cold here now the snow has been on the ground for some considerable time and the ice is inches deep and affords plenty of skating for those who like it. I had several goes but the ice is very hard and I was sore in several places after a few hours. We just got issued from the Y.M these little blocks with leather cases just like a pocketbook by joves the Y.M. has done a lot for us chaps out here one cannot speak to highly for it. I never thought much of it once but it is really a blessing gave us hot tea, soup, or hot milk one place in the trenches with a cigarette and piece of cake thrown in for nothing and it was dinkum I can tell you. I sent a cable home for some money but have not got an answer yet I will need a few pounds when in England to have a look round as I may not get another chance. I had a couple of letters from Amy with yours she is still down south with Fern, she is some kiddie isn't she. Effs boy looks a fine healthy chap but I don't think he can come up to Fern all said and done.

Well Mother I must close now as I have got a few more to write tonight so goodnight best love to all I remain

Your loving son Bob



France 12/7/17

Dear Mother, I have just come back from England so I thought I would drop you a few lines and let you know where I have been over there. I stopped four days in London, I could not get my money from the bank until Tuesday and I arrived on Saturday so I had a look round all the most interesting places that one reads about but seldom sees.

I went up to Middlesbrough and saw Lydia and all them there they came to the station to meet me so I soon found the way out to North Ormsby.

I had a good time there and had a look round all the iron and steel works it is a bit of an eye opener to anyone who has not seen them before. Mr Brown showed me all round as he is one of the heads there I had no trouble in getting a pass. We had one day at Redcar but I could not go for a swim as it was a bit too cold, but it is a very nice place I expect Emily knows it well as she has been there. I cannot find anything more about Duncan Mother but I will do all I can. I will close now with best love from your loving son Bob

NEW ZEALAND POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

Gallery of Caricatures

2066

WOL

387

1877 Felipe Breyer, Jr. & Family
Breyer

I regret to inform you that cancer
survived this day report: 6/26/31

Pl. 4 folios per hundred from 1st to 10th
please accept - my Sympathy &
trusting for a speedy recovery

J. Allen

Remains of Lefter

Received at 8/10 m by CEB

84. 30. 438-10 (MA/ 10-1-1943)

all isolated for three weeks &
our time was nearly up when
another ^{man} caught them two days
before we were to go back to Sling
so the gang went another three
weeks, & here I am still here.

We are getting some beautiful
spring weather now something like
the weather you read about -
but seldom see.

You will have heard that the
N.Z. football team won the King's
cup in the Inter Services competition
& we were all glad to see them
smack up these one eyed Englishmen
the papers here were all cracking
up these Mother Country team &
they got a bit of ~~their~~ a shock
when the diggers beat them twice,
our fellows played ~~to~~ France today
& gave them a beating, & next
Monday they are up against their
old rivals the Welsh & we all
hope to get another win.

I am going with a team to Wales
next week some time but it

is not a professional team just picked
out of about a couple of thousand diggers
& we are playing some club teams
in Wales. It should be quite a good
trip.

Well I do not think there is
much more news, nothing to
write about in this awful
place but I hope to be on the
way back soon & will tell you
all the news you will want to
know. It gets is Emily & Fern.
quite well I hope are they
stopping at home now or
are they down the Gorge way.

Well Mother I must close
now hoping to get some mail
soon or a letter anyway.
So cheerio just now

I Remain
Your Loving Son
Robert F. Gillespie

Front page missing

All isolated for three weeks and our time was nearly up when another man caught them two days before we were to go back to sling so bang went another 3 weeks and here I am still here

We are getting some beautiful spring weather now something like the weather you read about but seldom see

You will have heard that the NZ football won the Kings cup in the inter services competition and we were all glad to see them smack up these one eyed Englishmen the papers here were all cracking up their Mother country team and they got a bit of a shock when the diggers beat them twice, our fellows played France today and gave them a beating, and next Monday they are up against their old rivals the Welsh and we all hope to get another win.

I am going with a team to Wales next week some time but it is not a professional team just picked out of a couple of thousand diggers and we are playing some club teams in Wales it should be quite a good trip.

Well I do not think there is much more news nothing to write about in this awful place but I hope to be on the way back soon and will tell you all the news you will want to know. How is Emily and Fern? Quite well I hope they are stopping at home now or are they down the gorge way.

Well Mother I must close now hoping to get some mail soon or a letter anyway.

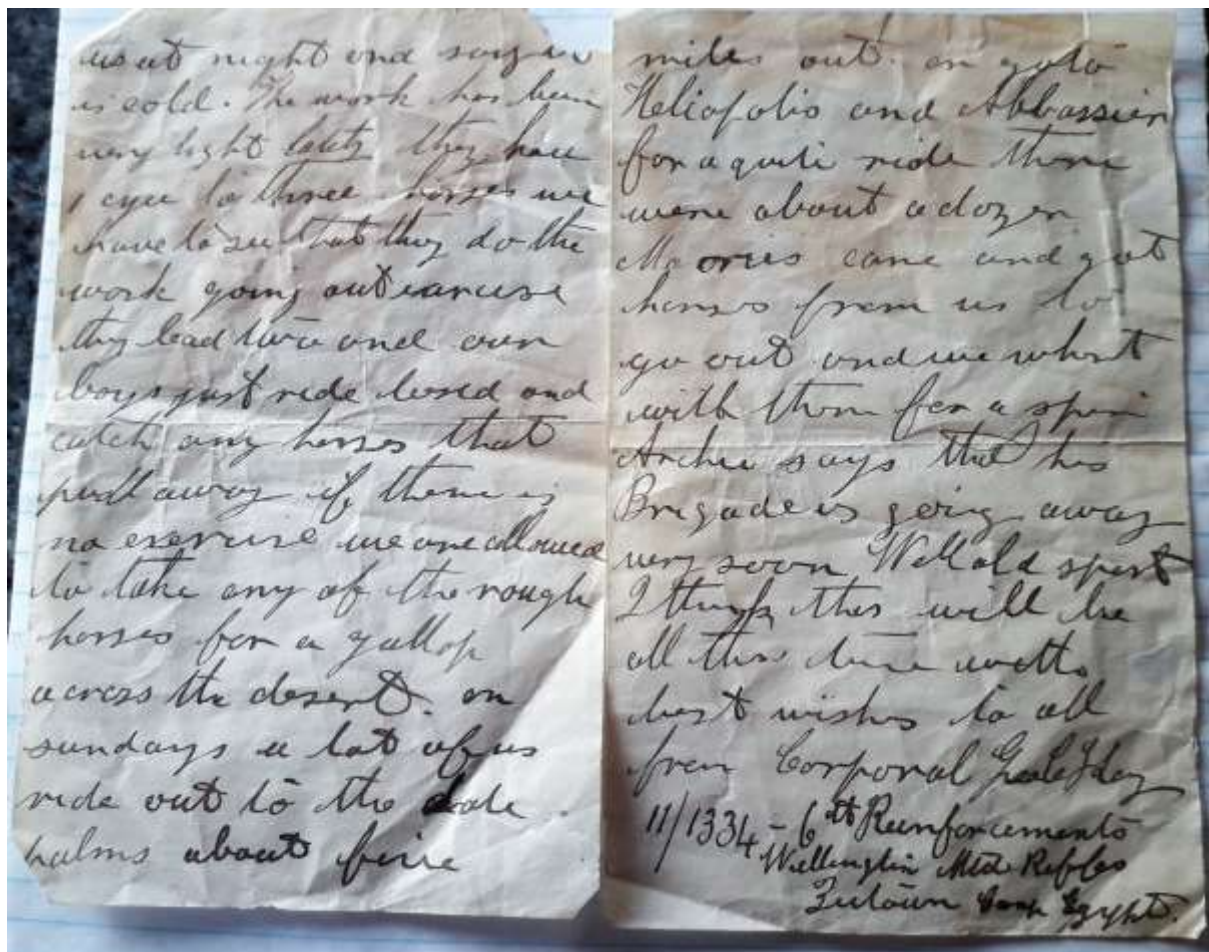
So cheerio just now

I remain

Your loving son

Robert F Gillespie

Letter sent to either Robert or Duncan from a cousin George Cheviot Kay 11/1334, killed in action 5/12/15 at Gallipoli. He was a Lance Corporal in the Wellington Mounted Rifles



NEW ZEALAND POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

Code: *8 m 30 1991 Wgt* Station: *Wgt* Office of Origin: *Wgt*



To *W. Gillipie Bridges* *Rel N. Bridges*
Auckland *Aks.*

Cable received to day reports
6/8631 N 4 Gillipie reporting unit
June 21st. - Bus record

Received at *5710* on *by aks*

ST. 50 (1,000 pads) (10/12-1910)



Robert Fraser Gillespie



Robert Fraser Gillespie on his return from the war, pictured with his wife Emily (Amy) and daughter Fern



Robert F Gillespie with his family

Back row from the left: Fern, Dora & June

Front Row from left: Emily, son Duncan and Robert.

During WWII Fern and June were in the Airforce and Dora and Duncan in the Army.

Bob was the head of the Home Guard in Balfour, Southland



Robert F Gillespie in his Model T Ford

With his family front from left Fern, Emily, June, Dora and Duncan



Robert Fraser

Their father William Gillespie

Duncan Thomas

Taken before Robert and Duncan left for WWI and the last photo of the three together



Gillespie Family upper Waiau

From left Duncan, Ida, Ann (nee Fraser) holding baby George, Nurse Fern Wornall, William Gillespie with Robert between his knees and Effie on the right.



Ann and William Gillespie seated with their family from left: Duncan, Ida, Effie, Robert and George



George and his brother Robert F Gillespie taken on Robert's return from Europe in 1919

