

# Ambrose Martin Cotterell

Remembering the sacrifices of those with South Canterbury connections who served their country 100 years ago.

Trooper Ambrose Martin Cotterell was working as a musterer for AG Nalder at Farlie when he, together with his younger brother Joseph, volunteered for service in 1915. Ambrose went into camp at Trentham where he was sworn into the Canterbury Mounted Rifles (CMR) on 26 August 1915.

On 9 October 1915 the reinforcements boarded SS Hororata which arrived at Suez 18 November 1915.

By the end of 1916 the CMR had won a series of actions against Ottoman forces, driven them out of the Sinai, and reached the border of Palestine in one of the most successful Allied campaigns of the war. These actions included the battle of Romani in August 1916 and the action at Magdhaba in December 1916.

During 1917 the CMR and the rest of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade took part in three battles for Gaza.

The most significant action for Ambrose was the attack on Rafa during which he was wounded in the thigh. He was first taken to an advanced casualty clearing station 13km away, a journey that took four hours, then by camel a further 30km to El Arish, followed by transfer to the General Hospital at Abassia.

Ambrose rejoined the CMR 10 April 1917. While he had been in hospital, an unsuccessful attempt had been made to capture Gaza on 26-27 March. He had returned just in time for the second battle of Gaza.

On 22 May the CMR took part in the raid on the Beersheba railway at Asluj and 25km of railway was destroyed using explosives. In June the CMR retired to a rest camp set up on the beach at Tel el Marakeb.

It was here that Ambrose was admitted sick to the Anzac Reception Station on 28 June 1917, one of 73 CRM men admitted that month.

From Tel el Marakeb Ambrose went down the line by camel and hospital train through a succession of clearing stations and



hospitals. It would be 21st August before he was admitted to the Aotea Convalescent Home at Heliopolis near Cairo. He was transferred to the NZ Convalescent Hospital at Port Said on 31 August where he remained until 20th September 1917. Ambrose was ill for almost three months, probably with malaria.

He was finally discharged to the Training Regiment on 20 September 1917 and was dispatched with a reinforcement draft to rejoin the CMR near Jaffa.

During 1918 the CMR and the rest of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade moved east across Palestine into the Jordan Valley as part of the Anzac Mounted Division. Two raids into the highlands east of the Jordan were costly failures.

A third raid in September reached Amman and took 7000 Ottoman prisoners. After a rest break Ambrose rejoined the CMR at Jerusalem on 9 October 1918 to find the CMR decimated by malaria and the war effectively over. In his absence, the CMR had finally occupied Es Salt and Amman.

On 28 July Ambrose sailed from Plymouth, England to New Zealand on HMS Hororata, the same ship that had transported him to Egypt nearly four years earlier. He was finally discharged from the army on 21 October.

He had served overseas for three years and 347 days and his total length of service was four years and 58 days. Ambrose was 64 when he died on 3 March 1958.

■ This is part of the SCRoll project. You can find SCRoll stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at [museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll](http://museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll)