

Cave War Memorial

“Lest we forget” and “We will remember them” are calls to pay tribute to our fallen soldiers, but now there are few who can remember the young men whose names appear on the war memorials that stand in numerous New Zealand districts and towns. Although we of later generations may not now recall the soldiers who were killed in World Wars 1 and 2, we can pay tribute to them by learning something about them beyond just their names and where they came from.

The following details are of the soldiers of the Cave district who lost their lives in World War 1 whose names are recorded, along with soldiers from the district who were killed in World War 2, on the Cave War Memorial on top of the hill which leads to Cannington. Several are also on the memorial gates at Cannington School. Photos of some of these servicemen are included.

The short biographies of the men killed in World War 1 are largely taken from SC Roll, the detailed Roll of Honour of South Canterbury casualties in that war which has been compiled by the South Canterbury Museum. The casualties named on the Cave Memorial are G. Alexander, A.C. Amyes, L. Hughan, M.D. Martin, A.M. Murphy, E.M. Murphy, T. Nelson and A. McInnes.

The first two deaths were at Gallipoli in Turkey, where New Zealand troops landed on 25 April 1915 and had their first major engagement in World War 1. This was an eventually unsuccessful attempt by the British, aided by large numbers of New Zealand and Australian troops, to take the Dardanelles from the Turks and so be able to ship armaments into the Black Sea and attack Germany's allies from the east.

Two weeks after landing at Anzac Cove, **Lance-Sergeant Alexander McInnes** was the first of those named on the Cave memorial to lose his life. He was born on 10 December 1888, the seventh of eight children of Malcom and Elizabeth McInnes. Malcom came to New Zealand from the Isle of Skye in 1866 and worked around Canterbury on farms. In the 1890s the family was in the Otaio district, where Alexander received his primary education. His secondary schooling was at Frankton Junction School following his father taking up employment as a shepherd in that district. By 1914 Alexander was employed in the grocery business, working for Grant and Co of Albury.

On 14 August 1914, just ten days after World War 1 began, Alexander enlisted in Timaru for service, and after training sailed from Lyttelton on 23 September. It was not until 16 October that it was considered safe for his ship to leave Wellington due to the presence of enemy warships in the South Pacific, but during this time the 1300 men of the Main Body of New Zealand's forces lived aboard their ship and were taken ashore daily for training and exercise. Following their arrival at Alexandria in Egypt on 3 December 1914, the NZEF continued training and took part in defensive exercises around Suez Canal.

On 12 April 1915 Alexander's battalion left Alexandria for the Dardanelles, arriving at Mudros Harbour on 15 April in preparation for the upcoming landings. The troops landed at Anzac Cove on 25 April, then on 6 May were deployed to Cape Helles at the southern end of the Gallipoli peninsula. An attack there on open ground on 8 May resulted in many casualties, one of them being Alexander. He was aged 25 and was killed a day after he had been promoted to Lance Sergeant. Tragically his brother Malcom was also killed at Gallipoli, on 7 August 1915.

Alexander McInnes's name is inscribed on the Twelve Tree Copse (NZ) Memorial at Helles. He is also commemorated on the Timaru Memorial Wall, Fairlie, Albury and Cave War Memorials, and on the Albury Football Club Roll of Honour.

Michael Martin, whose is also named on the Cave Memorial, was killed in action at Gallipoli on 8 August 1915, three months after Alexander McInnes. He was aged 28. This was the day New Zealand troops captured Chunuk Bair, a strategic point high on the Gallipoli peninsula which the New Zealanders were able to hold for only two days before being forced back. Michael's name is recorded on the Chunuk Bair (New Zealand) Memorial.

When he enlisted in December 1914, Michael Martin was single and boarding in a Wanganui hotel while working as a bushman in the district. He was the son of John and Mary Martin who in March 1904 drew Lot 81 in the Rosewill Settlement ballot. This is a 339-acre mostly flat farm on the east side of Pareora Gorge Road in Cannington, which subsequently has been owned by the Gray, Searle and Gibson families. The Gibsons have attached it to their adjoining Braeval hill property. The nearby Martin's Bridge across the Pareora River is named after Michael's parents.

The evacuation of New Zealand troops from Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli peninsula was completed on 20 December 1915. After a spell of recuperation, troops were moved to the Western Front of the war in France and their first major engagement there, the Battle of Flers – Courcellette. Although this, the second phase of the Battle of the Somme, began with good advances by New Zealand troops on 15 September, there were considerable losses.

Private Ernest Murphy was killed in action during this battle. He was the son of Michael Murphy, a widower who farmed on the 540-acre Cannington farm subsequently owned by the Blackmore, Stocker then Lee families. Ernest was born at Ladbroke near Christchurch on 4 December 1893 and went to Lincoln and Rolleston schools. In 1910 his father bought the farm in Cannington on which, at the time of his enlistment on 14 May 1915, Ernest was working as a farm hand. He contracted measles while in training at Trentham Camp and after spending some time in hospital embarked for Suez in Egypt on 9 October 1915. He served in Egypt until February 1916, then embarked for France on 6 April 1916 and proceeded to the Somme. Ernest Murphy was killed on 26

September 1916 during the Battle of Flers – Courcellette and is buried in Caterpillar Valley Cemetery near Longueval. He was aged 23 when he died.

With Ernest serving overseas, his younger brother **Allan Murphy** helped his father on the farm. But he felt he had to do his duty too, so on 17 June 1916, about the time Ernest arrived in the Somme area, he enlisted and embarked from Wellington for England on 16 February 1917. Following his arrival in France three months later he was incapacitated with an inflamed knee joint which required him to return to England for treatment. He rejoined his unit in April 1918 but was killed in action on 8 October during the second Battle of Le Cateau. This was one of many successful engagements by Allied forces in 1918, late in the war, which ultimately led to the collapse of the German war effort. Allan Murphy died just a month before the war ended and is buried in Honnechy British Cemetery, 8 km from the village of Le Cateau.

John Murphy had two other sons, the twins Harold and William who were born in 1899. They probably helped their father on the farm after the death of their two brothers, but in June 1920, less than two years after Allan's death, John, grieving and disheartened after the loss of his wife and then two sons, sold the farm to Jack Blackmore.

Two days after Allan Murphy died, **Laurence Hughan** was also killed in the Battle of Le Cateau. He was one of eight children of Helena and Gordon Hughan, who was a blacksmith at Cave. When he enlisted Laurence was also working as a blacksmith, probably with his father at Cave. He named his sister Miss H.M. Hughan of Cave as his next of kin. He left New Zealand on 17 February 1917 with the 22nd Reinforcements Canterbury Infantry Regiment, C Company.

Laurence was killed in action at Le Cateau on 10 October 1918, and is buried at St Aubert British Cemetery, Nord, France.

Interestingly, the name of his father **Gordon Hughan** is among the 41 on the Cave Memorial of soldiers who served in World War 1 and returned. He was 52 years old when he embarked with the troops on 7 December 1917. He gave a lower age when he enlisted but must have appeared much older than most who were being accepted.

Between 1914 and 1918 the New Zealand government acquired more than 10,000 horses to equip the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, nearly all of which went overseas. It was essential that farriers accompany these horses to maintain their feet and shoe them, so it is likely that Gordon Hughan, the Cave blacksmith who was a generation older than many of the troops, was filling this role.

Gordon left New Zealand on 7 December 1916, two months before his son Laurence sailed. Stan Hughan, who worked in the Cave district in the 1940s and '50s, would have been another son of Gordon.

Alfred Amyes' family owned the eastern-most farm in the Cannington valley, which is now part of the Eggleton family's Candy dairy farm. His father Alfred bought the 820-acre property in April 1916 and began working it with his two sons. A month later, one of his sons, 30-year-old Alfred junior, signed up to go to the war. He served in New Zealand until the end of September when he left for France. However, illness caused him to be hospitalized twice, and it was not until 15 September 1917 that he was well enough to rejoin his unit in France.

Alfred took part in the battle at Passchendaele in southern Belgium on 12 October 1917, when New Zealand forces attacked strongly held German positions in appallingly wet and muddy conditions. Chapter 4 of Glyn Harper's book *Massacre at Passchendaele* is entitled *Disaster: 12 October*. This, he said, "was a day of tragedy that has to be ranked as the very worst in New Zealand's path toward nationhood. . . New Zealand's losses in the morning's action were catastrophic: 117 officers and 3179 men [killed and wounded] in a few hours." Alfred Amyes was one of the soldiers cut down in this disastrous attack. His body was never recovered, and he is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial in the immense Belgian war cemetery of the same name.

The Amyes family continued to farm in Cannington until 1946.

Thomas Nelson was born on 8 July 1891 to John and Selina Nelson who farmed at Ma Waro west of Cave, where Thomas attended primary school. After school he worked on the Austin brothers' farm at Albury for six years, and when he enlisted on 11 May 1917 he worked as a teamster for John Bray of Cricklewood. Thomas embarked at Wellington on 13 June and, after training at Sling Camp on the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, left for France and the Western Front on 6 October 1917.

New Zealand troops were still fighting in the south-west of Belgium early in 1918, three months after their disastrous battle at Passchendaele. On 9 January 1918 Thomas Nelson received multiple shell wounds while in action in that area. He was taken to a field hospital where he died the following day. He was buried in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium.

A memoriam notice in *The Timaru Herald* on 20 January 1920, "In loving memory of Private Tom Nelson. . . Inserted by his loving father, mother, sisters and brothers (Ma Waro)." shows that Tom was from a large family. By good fortune his brother Robert, who also served, survived the war. Mrs. Nelson had the honour of unveiling the Cave War Memorial in 1928.

When he enlisted on 4 May 1917, **George Alexander** was aged 29 and working on his mother's farm, the 200-acre "Sunnybrook" which lay near the Upper Pareora Gorge in Cannington. After serving for six months in New Zealand, he departed on 21 November 1917 and arrived in France in March the following year.

By August 1918 fighting on the Western Front had returned to the Somme district of France. With the Germans then clearly on the defensive, the Allies looked to maintain the pressure with a series of fresh offensives. On 21 August the British Third Army, which included the New Zealand Division, attacked along a 15-km front north of Amiens, pushing the German line back and driving toward Bapaume. Four days later the New Zealand Division attacked again, attempting to outflank Bapaume, but the defenders held firm.

George Alexander was wounded in the heavy fighting on 25 August and died the following day. He is buried in the Bagneux British Cemetery at Gezaincourt in the Somme district. His medals, scroll and plaque were sent to his mother who was then living in Timaru, as she had sold the farm soon after George signed up.

The deaths of these eight young men who had just reached their best years was a tragedy for their families and for the Cave district. Similar devastation was caused in communities throughout New Zealand by the Great War. This war was supposed to end all wars but, sadly, many more cherished and valued young men were to be lost when another generation went to war against the same adversary, after a peace of only 21 years.