

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF

**AMBROSE MARTIN
COTTERELL**

26 JULY 1893 - 3 MARCH 1958

This book was researched and compiled by Alister Cotterell and he has tried to convey the hardships that Ambrose served under in WW1. This was to affect his health in later life.

Much more could have been written but it is hoped that the family will find something of interest in his life story.

Special thanks to Mary for her valuable work on the computer.

14th DECEMBER. 2001.

AMBROSE MARTIN COTTERELL
26 JULY 1893 - 3 MARCH 1958

Ambrose was born at Fairlie Creek (now Fairlie) on the 26 July 1893, although his WW2 records indicates his birth date as 11 July 1894.

He was the ninth child (family folklore says he was the only surviving twin) of William Henry Cotterell from Abergavenny in Wales and Margaret Anne O'Connor from Tulla in County Clare, Ireland.

Ambrose spent his early childhood years at Silverstream (now Kimbell) where his father secured work in the district until in the 1890's his mother signed a deed for Section 7 of 305 acres 3 roods in the Ashwick Flat Reserve Survey District.

This was the block nearest to the gorge and although the setting was picturesque with the hills and bush for a background, while on the river side ran a steep bracken covered terrace which gave the farm its name "Fern Terrace".

Ambrose and his brothers and sisters, it was reported, had vivid recollections of their first night at No 7, for after pitching two tents and with the children off to bed, the parents went off to Fairlie for supplies, but during their absence an old man nor'wester sprung up blowing the tents down upon the sleeping children. Although some were old enough to be responsible for the younger ones they were all young enough to be afraid of the wild pigs which could be heard grunting around their little camp and to feel lonely when the more porks gave their mournful cry so it was with great relief the parents were greeted on their return.

The land was a windswept tree less plain so the family quickly set to and planted a large belt of pines around the property. Ornamental shrubs wereplanted flanking the drive and an orchard was planted and in later years raspberries grew in abundance, people coming from near and far to pick the luscious berries.

Their first home was a little cob house under the terrace out of the wind, the children being willing helpers after their experience of sleeping in tents. All was serene until a big flood washed their home away so once again they were forced to sleep under canvas or more correctly 'calico'.

Margaret Cotterell and the children then built a second house on top of the terrace, the winds having less terror than the floods. William Cotterell had by this time returned to the sea to try to recover from the losses which



William Henry Cotterell 1850 - 1911
Margaret Anne Cotterell (nee O'Connor) 1857 - 1910
Photographed at their Rae's Junction Hotel 1908.

occured at that time, owing to a slump in both wool and lambs, all the settlers were hard hit at this time.

Ambrose's first school days were at Ashwick Flat school with his older brothers and sisters, as the distance to school proved too great, his parents eventually acquired a little cottage in Kimbell where the children of school age lived with their father who worked at various jobs around the district and at the Woolwash at Kimbell. Ambrose with his father and the other children would then return to the farm for the weekends which had been left in the care of Mrs Cotterell and the older children.

On the farm trees had to be watered during dry spells and Ambrose and all the children were required to carry buckets of water up the steep track while the younger members ran up and down with treacle billies.

In 1902 a Lands Board Ranger (Mr Williams) reported that the plantation had been well cared for with over two thousand trees, mainly pines were planted and also larch, macrocarper and spruce. He stated it was one of the best in the district. In their six years on the property it was reported that improvements included a 40 x 14 cob house, iron shed 15 x 9, Dairy 10 x 8, Sheep yards, fencing, half acre garden and surface sowing as the ground was too stony to cultivate.

So in those early years Ambrose and his brothers and sisters were called on to help during weekends and school holidays with farm work.

Ambrose was to have a big change in 1907 when his parents left "Fern Terrace" in the care of the eldest son, William, to take up hotel keeping at Rae's Junction in Central Otago, a move that may have been prompted by the fact that Mrs Cotterell's sister, a Mrs Lawlor, had also entered the hotel business.

Ambrose and his younger brother Joseph were now attending the Rae's Junction school and later were to do work around the district and at the hotel.

The Cotterell's made numerous friends throughout the district and among the travelling public who appreciated their kindness of heart and the homeliness of their hotel. In the Tupeka Times many articles appeared testifying to the many functions that both parents put on at the hotel, many running on to the early hours of the morning and especially of the generous nature of both parents.



Ambrose Martin Cotterell (1893 - 1958) (first on left;
Norman Henry Cotterell (1891 - 1966) (second on left;
Margaret Anne Cotterell (1857 - 1910) (third from left
William Henry Cotterell (1850 - 1911) sixth from left;
Joseph Richard Cotterell (1894 - 1952) seventh from left)
The other two girls are thought to be Bertha Emma Cotterell
on right and Florence Hiles Cotterell, fourth from right.

Tragedy, however, was to strike the family when Mrs Cotterell had the intrusion of some foreign body into the thumb contacting blood poisoning which necessitated her removal from Rae's Junction to Dunedin Hospital (a long distance in those days) where the amputation of her left arm was deemed necessary and from the shock of the operation and non arrest of the poison in the system Margaret passed away on the 12 May 1910 and was buried in the Dunedin Cemetery.

The loss of his mother who was the strong member in the family came as a severe loss to Ambrose and the other family members but less than a year later, on 10 April 1911 further grief struck the family with the sudden death of his father. He was buried in Dunedin with Margaret and until recent years the graves were unmarked but now bear a large white cross with their names and the wording 'Early settlers of the Fairlie District'.

This then ended the life of Ambrose at Rae's Junction and he returned with Joseph and some of the other family members to the Farm making 'Fern Terrace' their headquarters.

Ambrose at this time was working around the Fairlie district mustering but about 1912 another disaster was to strike the family when their second house was burned down, all that was left being the little cob dairy set amongst what had once been a lovely garden with clipped box edgings.

Ambrose's older brother William farmed the property until 1920 when he sold to Mr Les Whyte who built a substantial house out of the pines which the Cotterells had planted, the ferns had by now died out and No 7 was now changed to 'Pine Terrace'. In later years the house was shifted down to 'Shinness' so once again 'Fern Terrace' or 'Pine Terrace' was without a house.

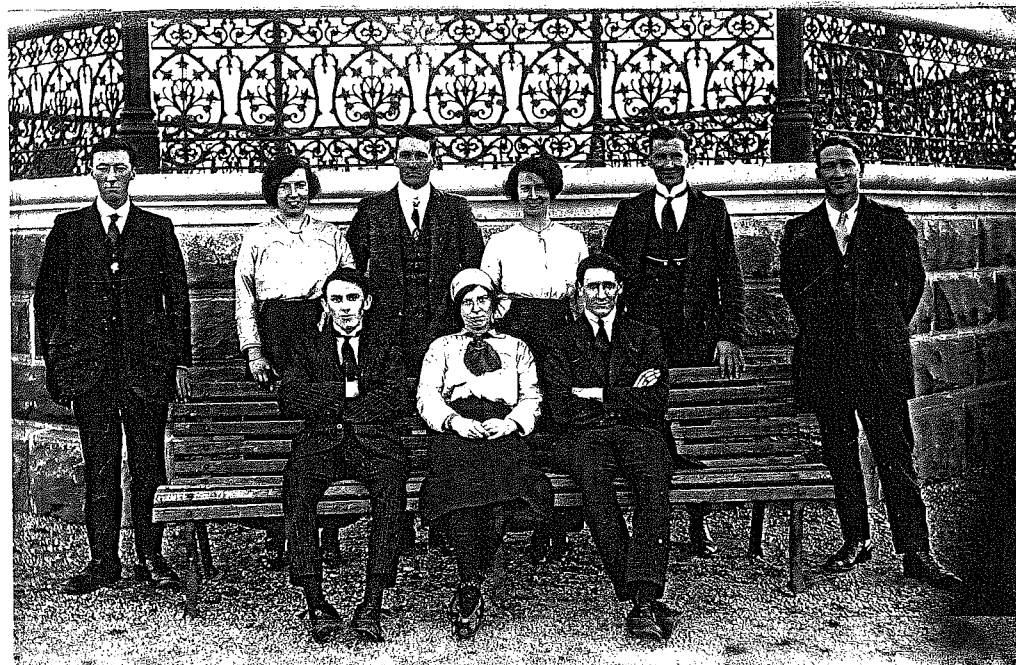
Ambrose and Joseph had by now enlisted in the Territorials. Ambrose was at this time working for a Mr A G Nalder at Fairlie. On the 26 August 1915 he was attested at Trentham after final leave with Joseph when they stayed with their Aunty Lawlor at the Criterion Hotel in Waimate.

His war records describe him as being 5 feet 8 1/2 inches, weight 11 stone, complexion fresh, eyes, light brown, hair dark brown.

He was assigned to the 8th South Canterbury Mounted Rifles and after their final leave rode their horses over the Christchurch summit road to Lyttleton where they sailed for Wellington and on to Trentham.



On final leave, 1915, spent in Waimate with the Lawlors - left, standing, Joseph Cotterell, Theresa Lawlor and Ambrose Cotterell,



JOSEPH COTTERELL taken on return from overseas 1919

In a postcard to his brother Norman dated 8 Oct 1915 he wrote the following -

Dear Norman,

I suppose you will know this photo (it was of himself and Joseph) it was taken the day we came in to camp. It has been raining here all day - we are busy preparing for Saturday.

Fancy getting up at 4 am tomorrow, we are sailing tomorrow afternoon so I wont have time to write to you again until we get to Albany (Western Australia).

Remember me to all in Fairlie, dont forget to write to me when I am away, letters will go very high in Egypt. Address my letters to Trooper A M Cotterell 7/1603 C Squadron 7 Reinforcements C/- GPO Wellington.

Love to all from Ambrose.

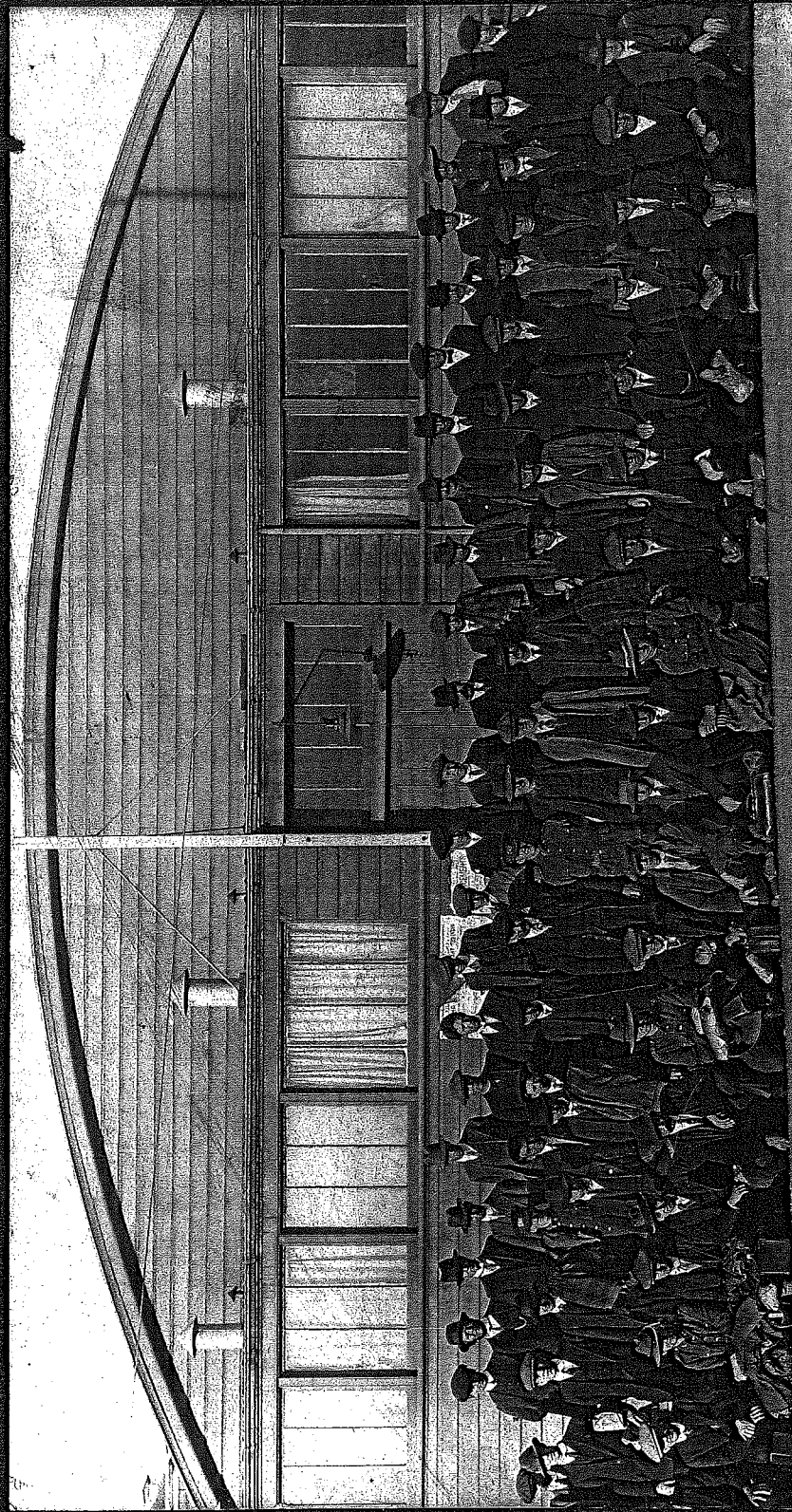
He sailed on His Majesty's New Zealand Troop Ship Number 280 SS Hororata from Wellington via Albany in Western Australia and disembarked at Suez on the 18 November 1915.

His posting was to the 8th Squadron C M R on 8 January 1916 and he left from Zeitoun about 7 miles outside Cairo for the Suez Canal on 23 January 1916 to carry out patrol duty in front of the British defences protecting this vital waterway.

At the end of February Ambrose was with his unit who were called on to do long patrols out into the desert looking for any move of the Turks which might be threatening the Suez Canal.

Ambrose's unit was called out into the wastes of the Sinai Desert for patrol work. At this time it was the practice to ride twenty minutes, walk ten minutes, ride twenty minutes and then spell for ten minutes in every hour of the march, this proved too hard on men and horses and was later discontinued.

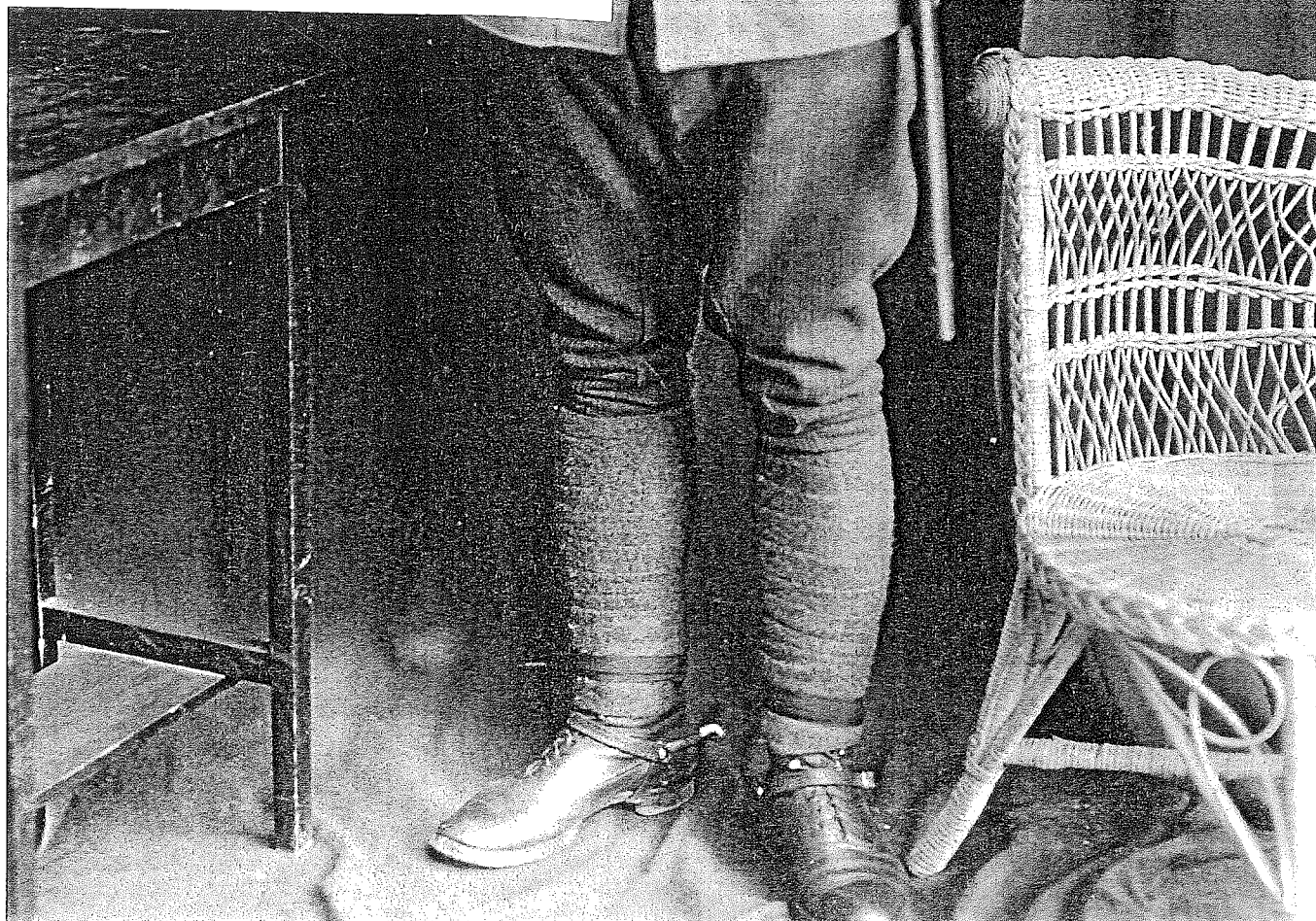
From the bivouac at Bir Et Malar Ambrose's unit were constantly called out on patrol and reconnaissance work of the most trying kind, commonly being summoned at half an hour's notice, on one such patrol Ambrose's unit found no water at Debabis because the Turks had been there before them and 90 men in the unit were struck down with sunstroke, the heat being 118 degrees F in the shade. Flies, mosquitoes and midges contributed their quota to the already sufficient hardships of life. Men's rations were often indifferent consisting largely of 'bully beef' and 'hard tack' this afflicted them with a form of sand colic, which made it almost



Induction into Army 1915, photo taken outside Army Hall, High Street, Timaru.
Middle row, fifth from left in uniform Joseph Cotterell and 10th from left, in uniform, Ambrose Cotterell.
Both in uniform as they were members of the Territorial Army.



Ambrose Cotterell final leave 1915



impossible for them to eat during the heat of the day without immediately vomiting, small wonder then that Ambrose suffered in later life with his health.

At the beginning of August Ambrose's unit was attacked by a force of about eighteen thousand Turks in number after being reinforced by other units, the turks were beaten off and withdrew to Katia some 7000 Turks were taken prisoner.

This followed a period of more patrols when 'standing in' every morning usually 3 am when all hands would have to turn out dressed, saddle the horses, tie horse feed and other necessary gear to their saddles and be ready to move at a moments notice as this was the most likely hour for the enemy to attack.

Ambrose's unit in their passages across the Sinai Desert traversed the ancient caravan route between Egypt and Palestine over which in Biblical times Joseph and Mary travelled with the infant Christ. This way was also taken by Napoleon in 1799, his units watering at Katia at Napoleon's wells.

The load carried by a Mounted Rifleman's horse in the field was considerable and Ambrose would have on his person a leather bandolier containing 150 rounds of ammunition, bayonet, service rifle and haversack, the latter stuffed with tins of bully beef and army biscuits. The saddlery on his mount consisted of headrope, picketing rope, saddle and blanket. In addition to this the horse carried slung around his neck, a leather sand muzzle which was slipped on in place of the nosebag when he had finished his meagre feed to prevent him eating sand and dirt. In this sand muzzle Ambrose would carry his mess tin or 'billy' for cooking or making tea and his dandy brush for grooming. The next item was the horse bandolier slung round the horses neck and containing an additional 90 rounds of ammunition.

Strapped on the front of the saddle were two leather wallets containing towel, soap, spare shirt, socks and strapped on top of these again would be the greatcoat and one blanket.

Ambrose would carry rations for forty-eight hours and horse rations for three days (27 lbs).

his horse feed would be distributed between two nosebags tied at the side of the saddle, and a sandbag, around which might be rolled a ground sheet or bivouac sheet, strapped across the rear of the saddle. Also slung on the side of the saddle would be a water bucket for watering the horse and Ambrose's own ablutions and of course his water bottle, that very water held today by the writer of his father's life, all up weight would be 20 stone, a heavy load indeed for a horse on shifting sand.

Since the fall of Magh Dabe the most important southern outpost of the Turks was at Rafa, the Gateway to Palestine. Ambrose's unit together with a Brigade of Camels and an Indian mounted Battery marched all night a distance of over thirty miles to get into a position north east of Rafa soon after dawn.

The attack commenced from three sides and as the country was open and only slightly undulating the attack had to be carried out dismounted, over ground devoid of all cover and fully commanded by the heavily entrenched redoubt held by the Turks. The attack was pushed home and culminated in a brilliant charge under a hail of fire over the last two hundred yards, many casualties being sustained among them Ambrose who was wounded by a gunshot to the upper left thigh. The date was 9 January 1917.

It was about 11 o'clock at night before the wounded, including Ambrose, could be moved in sand carts, these were two wheeled hooded carts fitted with broad tyres for travelling in the sand. The advanced casualty clearing station was eight miles away, the journey taking four hours, from where Ambrose proceeded by camel with Cacolets slung on each side of the saddle a further distance of nineteen miles to El. Arish from there Ambrose was admitted to the 24 Staty Hospital in Kantara on 11 January 1917 then transferred to 27 General Hospital at Abbassia on 14 January and finally to the Aotea Rest Home at Heliopolis on 30 January.

Due to his run down health condition and the wound received he was not discharged until 23 February 1917.

His discharge to the NZ Mounted Training Regiment was further interrupted when he was readmitted sick to the 26 Staty Hospital Ismaclia on 19 March 1917. He rejoined the Training Regiment on 27 March 1917 and transferred to Brigade on 8 April, he rejoined CMR on 10 April 1917.

Due to the harsh and unforgiving conditions he had lived under during his time in the desert Ambrose was again admitted to the Anzac Reception

Station on the 28 June 1917 then to the Hospital Train 3 July, thence to the 26 Casualty Clearing Station 4 July, then to the 27 General Hospital Abbassia on 6 August again to Staty Hospital on the same date then to the 27 General Hospital on 10 August and finally to the Aotea Convalescent Home Heliopolis 21 August and the N Z Convalescent Hospital at Port Said 31 August 1917.

Ambrose was then discharged to Training Regiment 20 September and transferred to Brigade on 24 November with a posting to CMR on 28 November and a promotion to Lance Corporal on 30 May 1918.

A further posting to a Rest Camp Port Said 15 August was followed by a further posting to a Training unit and return to CMR on 9 October 1918.

I mention all the hospitals and Rest Homes that Ambrose was admitted to because under the very harsh conditions faced not only the hazards of war were encountered but the conditions they fought under lead his unit to suffer many casualties from disease. In the Mounted New Zealand Units Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury it was Canterbury Mounted Rifles who suffered the most - killed 173, Died of Wounds 91, Died of disease 65, Wounded 729. So disease and sickness was a major problem his unit had to face.

Ambrose in later years was reluctant to speak of his next posting to the Dardanelles from Kantara on 27 November 1918. So one can only surmise what work that they had to carry out at Gallipoli, they returned to Alexandria on 31 January 1919 and demobilization commenced.

This was a sad time for many of the men as all the horses which had done such good work and been such trusty servants of their devoted masters had to be put down.

So after three years in Sinai and Palestine the NZ Mounted Rifle Brigade was one of the very few units which took an active part in the campaign from its inception in 1915 to its close at the end of 1918. It was essentially a fighting unit from start to finish - a unit which suffered its full share of battle casualties, with, in the later stages of the campaign, a big proportion of loss from tropical disease. The Brigade took part in every major operation east of the Suez Canal.

So Ambrose was to leave behind the Jordan Valley with its 'Mount of Temptation', Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and embark on the SS

Princess Juliana for Marseilles en route to the United Kingdom on 23 May 1919.

In London Ambrose reported to the Military Sling Camp on 8 July 1919 with his younger brother Joseph who had fought beside him throughout the war.

Ambrose and Joseph were to spend three weeks in London and it was during this time that he presented his hat badge to a girl and this was to be returned to him by post in 1945 and is now framed with his medals.

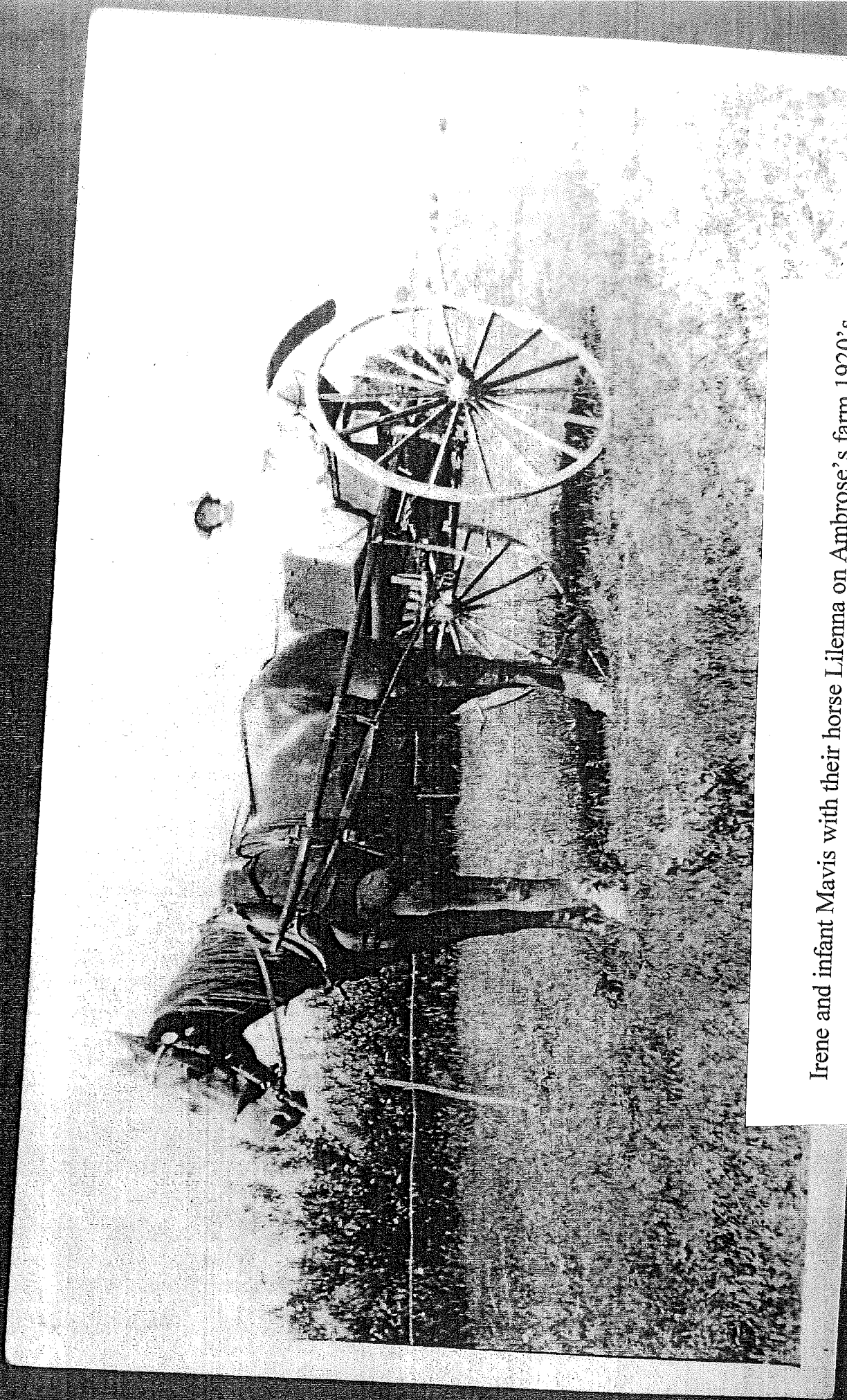
Both then sailed from Plymouth on 28 July 1919 (the same port that his wife to be, Irene Olver had sailed from just 11 years before.) The vessel was again His Majesty's New Zealand Troop Ship Number 280 SS Hororata, and after a voyage of 54 days arrived back in New Zealand and was discharged on 21 October 1919 having served overseas for 3 years 347 days with a total Service of 4 years and 58 days. I believe his length of service overseas was matched by his daughter Mavis's WW2 service in the WAAC.

His medals awarded were the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, and the Victory Medal. His hat and tunic buttons along with his wounded stripe and dog tag are now framed, together with his first large RSA badge and are held by the writer.

Ambrose returned to Fairlie where two weeks later he acted as best man for his cousin Martin O'Connor.

Work was secured around the district and one day he was harvesting at the McDonald farm at Winscombe and the nanny came out with the traditional pail of barley water. The nanny's name was Violet Irene Patience Olver and the rest as they say, is the remaining history of Ambrose's life.

Ambrose settled on a small farm on Talbots Road, Fairlie (owned by his Auntie Lawlor) in the early 1920's. It was while they were living there that Mavis, Joseph and Anthony were born. In spite of Ambrose putting in considerable hard work fencing and bringing the soil into production, like many others at the time he was forced in the late 1920's to walk off the farm.



Irene and infant Mavis with their horse Lilenna on Ambrose's farm 1920's

Ambrose and the family shifted down to Temuka in an effort to secure work but at this stage his health was beginning to be effected by his war service. They did find a house to rent but no work and with an addition being expected to the family,(Patricia), one can imagine this must have been an extremely stressful time for Ambrose and Irene.

A position became available on a small farm at Waitawa owned by a Mr Arthur Cargill and a house was available in exchange for milking cows and doing general farm work. With no power or running water available life was still very hard but with an increasing family milk was available plus a large orchard. Ambrose kept a large garden and numerous hens and was able to catch rabbits and hares and also eels in a nearby creek so during the depression years Ambrose and Irene were able to provide plenty of food for the family

During these years at Waitawa five more children came along and except for a brief period in the 1930's to Pleasant Point, Ambrose remained on the property at Waitawa and worked in various areas around the district for the Public Works Dept until he left Waitawa to live in Timaru in June 1940.

What a change for Ambrose and Irene and the family for here was running hot and cold water and lights that just lit up when a switch was pushed down, also the toilet flushed with a pull of the chain.

Ambrose continued his work with the Public Works Dept until he was called up for war service in 1941.

On 28 March 1941 Ambrose was again attested for Army Service due to the rapid approach of the Japanese in the South Pacific and a real threat to NZ.

He marched into the Timaru Military Camp on 10 January 1942 and I recall we were all going to be at the gate when he marched past 67 Evans Street, however the day turned out to be very wet and they were transported in Army trucks.

It is noted on his Army records that his weight was 13 stone, 2 stone heavier than his WW1 weight and his complexion was now described as dark rather than fresh, as on his previous record.

On 21 October 1942 Ambrose was appointed Quartermaster Storeman and on the 20 January 1944 was promoted to Sergeant.

As a school boy I recall various times that his unit marched through Stafford Street and on one occasion a full scale live shell exercise on Caroline Bay when the object was to sink an old boat in the bay, however, after having been hit numerous occasions it just would not sink.

He was discharged on 1 September 1944 and awarded the 1939-45 War Medal and the NZ War Service medal, having served in the army in two world wars for a total time of 7 years 238 days.

On the Ashwick Flat War Memorial is the inscription 'This Monument is erected in memory of the men from this district who served in the Great War 1914 - 1918.' On the south side of the monument together with other names are A M Cotterell and J R Cotterell.

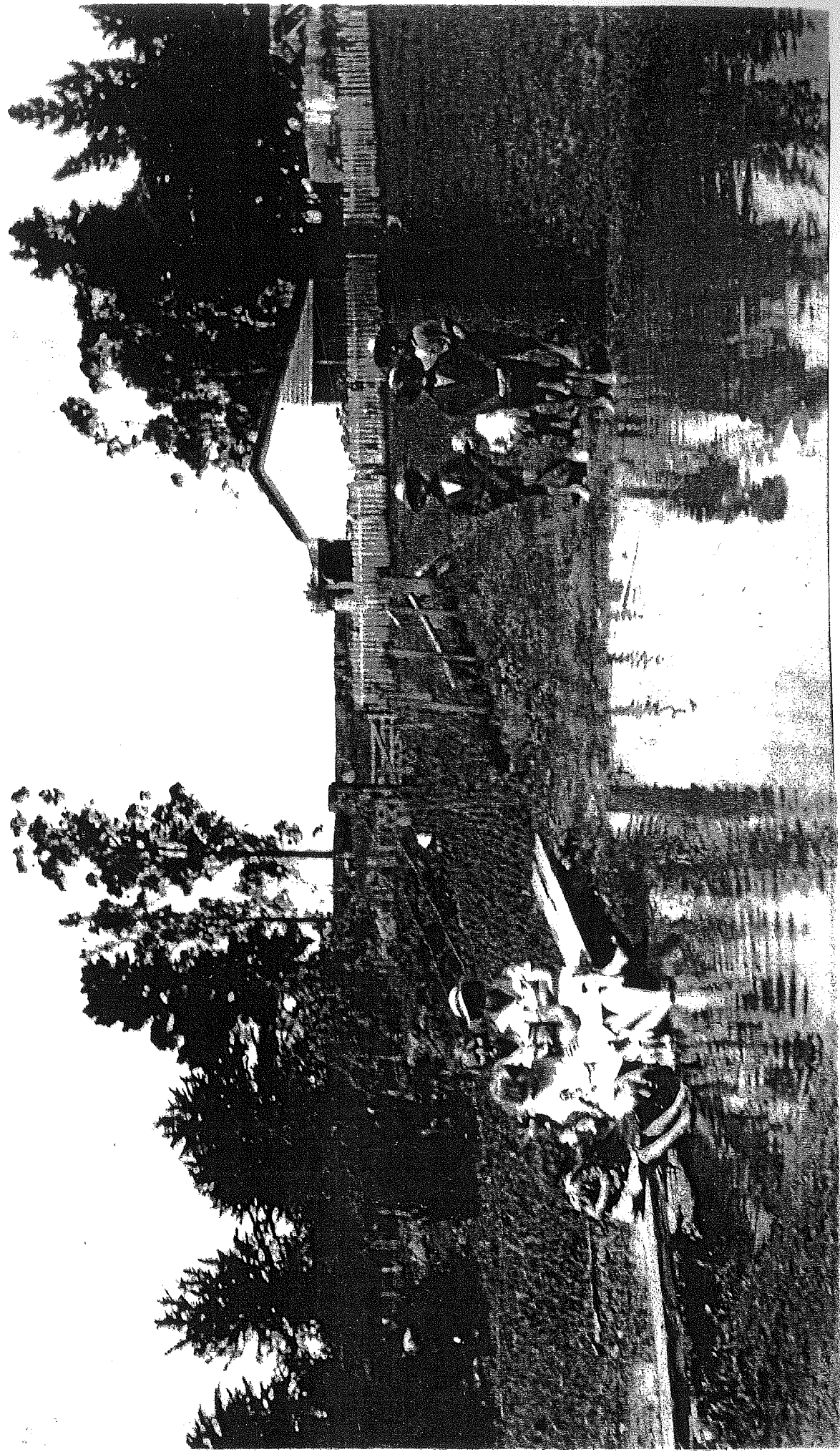
On his release from the army he worked for the Timaru City Council and also for two years at the Pareora Freezing Works until ill health forced him to seek early retirement.

Ambrose enjoyed those years with Irene when they would both be able to relax with most of their family away from home and they used to enjoy walks through the park along the sea front, also going to the pictures, another favourite was sitting out in the sun porch at 67 Evans Street watching the passing traffic.

Ambrose died suddenly on Monday 3 March 1958 and was buried in the Timaru Cemetery. He was aged 65.



AMBROSE COTTERELL (centre rear standing on plank) working on the downlands irrigation scheme 1930's.

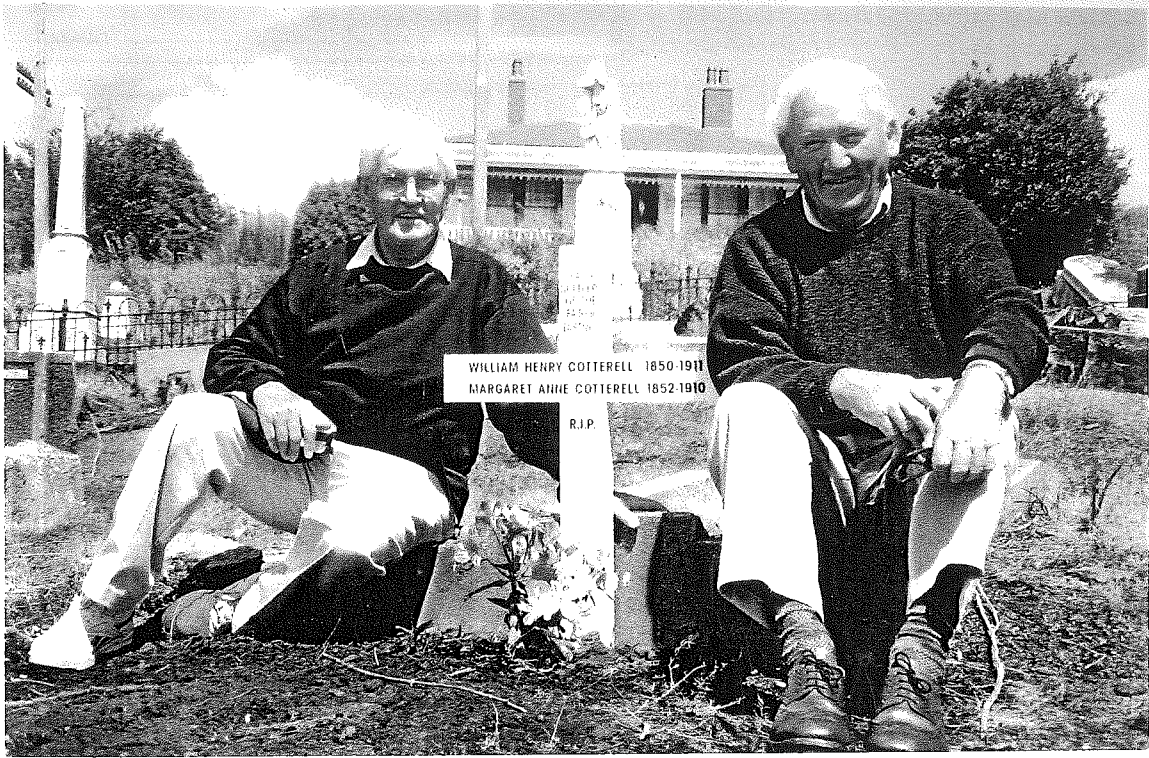


THE AMBROSE COTTERELL FAMILY taken at Waitawa late
1930's.



The house at Waitawa where the Cotterell Family lived during the years 1927-32 and again between 1933-1940.

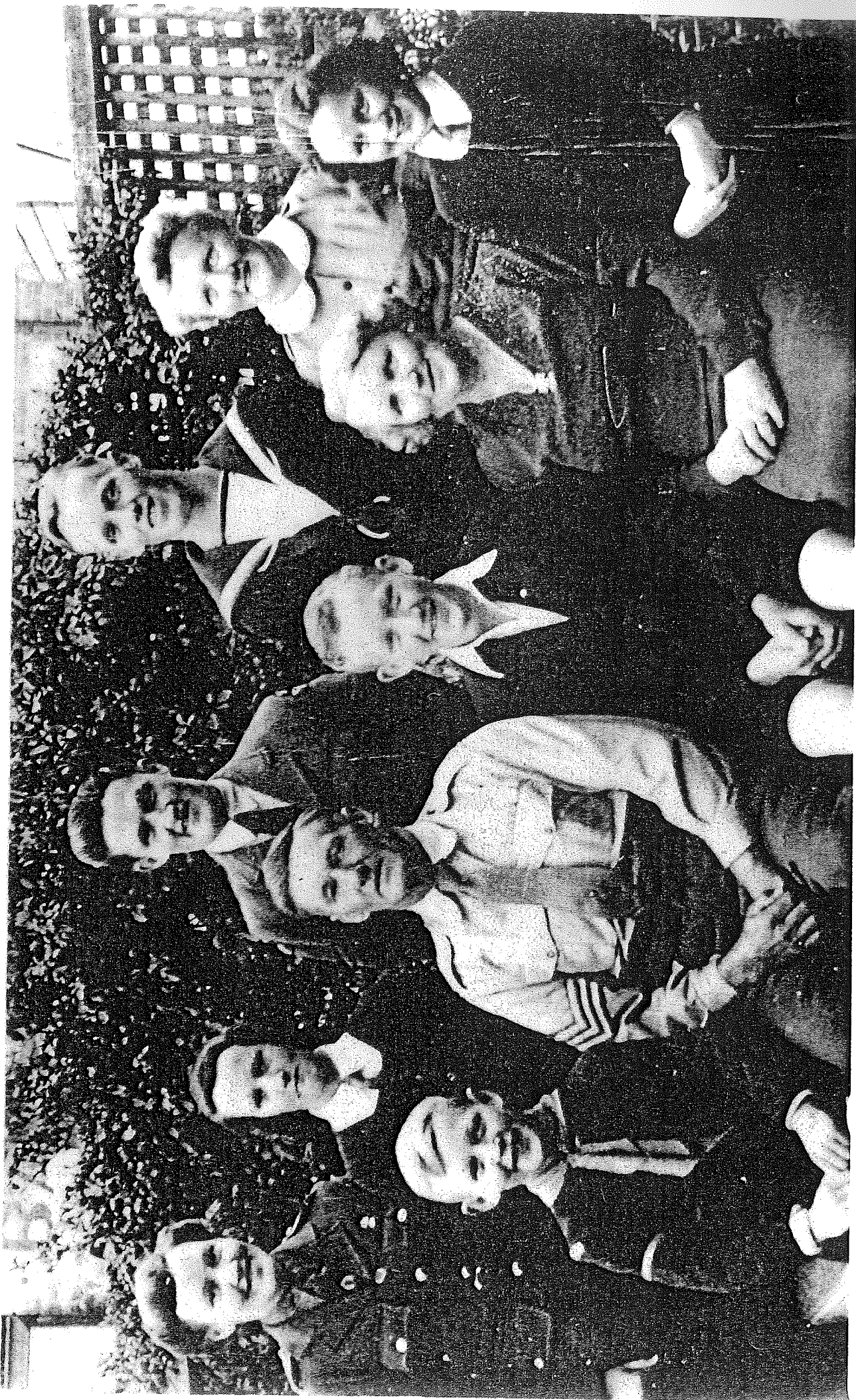
This photograph was taken about 1916 and shows left to right Lucy Scannell (wife of Chris Scannell), and Matt Scannell (son of Patrick Scannell). Matt died in 1992 aged 89, and Catherine Mary, Patricks daughter who married Denis Patrick Fitzgerald.



Above - Grandparents grave
Dunedin Cemetery



War Memorial, Monument Road,
Fairlie



Ambrose & Irene Cotterell and family - Joe's final leave 1944

Towards the end of 1939 the Army were holding a large territorial training camp at Sutherlands just west of Pleasant Point. (We found in later years it was the 27th Batt, a unit in later years that Tony was in).

Joseph, Bernie (from Geraldine), Tony and the writer were going to see the display, but although the distance from Waitawa was some 12 km we only had one bike between us and as it happened, it was Ambrose's new bike just received from the Farmers Trading Company in Auckland, with a shared arrangement all went well until on the return journey through Pleasant Point it was decided to try out this new bike at the Domain Cycle track and as with most boys bad moments, a stick flew up and removed a number of spokes from the front wheel, so it was agreed by all that a car must have backed into it at the display and this was accepted by Ambrose. We were fully aware of the importance of the bike because it was his only means of transport to his work some 10km. Dad later in life did get to hear the true story from Bernie who had forgotten in the intervening years our original story.

A load of coal -

Dad was shocked to be refused a load of coal when he placed an order with the coal company that he dealt with at Pleasant Point. The owner telling him he had not paid for the last delivery. Dad went through his receipts and produced the one in question. It turned out that the owner's brother-in-law had a receipt book and he was pocketing the money.

Tonsils -

About 1935 dad had an operation for tonsils. This operation was at that time of life always fairly dicey and he had complications. Arthur Cargill had a ring from the hospital to say Ambrose was very low and unless they could stop the bleeding his recovery was not good, he did recover but was very rundown. Some months after this operation the doctor recommended a small bottle of stout before dinner at night and this appeared to be a help.

Snippets -

We had some very heavy floods through the property in the 1930's and the writer recalls Ambrose on one occasion having to ride the horse across the swollen stream at Waitawa and the force of the water carried the horse down stream, fortunately he finally reached the bank on the other side.

During the depression years Ambrose was forced to sell his car and as part payment he received a ladies bike which then became our only means of transport.

Of the five thousand men of the New Zealand Force in Palestine something like three thousand were either in hospital or convalescent depots mostly with malaria. Ambrose and Joseph were both victims.