

The Armidale Express & New England General Advertiser (N.S.W.) 18-6-1907

The Late Sergt. Major Fraser.

Late in last April, we (Inverell Times), published the following extract from the Armidale Express " The many friends of Staff-Sergeant R.D. Fraser, of the Australian Light Horse, who left Armidale for England some time ago to undergo special training, will be pleased to learn that he has successfully passed all his examinations, received his certificate, and will sail for Australia on the 10th May." That was the proposition of man, but before the time for his departure arrived he was stricken down with a serious illness. About a week ago his parents, who reside in this district, received a cablegraphic message that their son was in a precarious condition. A few days back a second cable received by the military authorities in Sydney from London announced his decease in the London Hospital. The deceased was a very well known man in Inverell, where he spent his boyish days. In his early life he was in the employ of Mr. C. S. Thorley and was induced to join the old Mounted Rifles. Drill Instructor Daly was stationed here at the time, and afterwards the deceased received tuition fresh Drill Instructor Wasson. The latter induced the young soldier to go on with his military training, which he did with much success, as the clipping from the Armidale paper bears out. His death in surroundings so far away from his own people but tends to increase the sadness of the event! The officer was about 34 years of age and leaves a wife and three children. He was a son of Mr. D. Fraser, of Rose Valley." The news was received with much regret in Inverell, and the sympathy of a large number of the population of the town is with the relatives in the hour of their trouble and tribulation.

The Age (Queanbeyan, N. S. W.) 18-6-1907

MILITARY ITEMS.

Staff-sergeant-major Fraser, late of the Instructional Staff and formerly of the N.S.W: Mounted Rifles, (Inverell squadron) died in England on Saturday last. Some of the old Mounted Rifles in the Queanbeyan district will doubtless remember their late comrade, at least in the Hutton and Duff competitions. At the time of his death he was undergoing a course of instruction with the Imperial troops at Aldershot. His death was not unexpected as he had been suffering very acutely from bronchial troubles since his arrival in England.

The Tenterfield Intercolonial Courier and Fairfield and Wallangarra Advocate (N.S.W.) 13-12-1907

A TRIBUTE FROM COMRADES.

At 5.30 on Tuesday afternoon, in the local drill hall Major-General Hoad unveiled a tablet erected-to the memory of the late Regimental Sergeant-Major Robert Fraser; who commenced his military career in Inverell, and who died in England-whilst undergoing a course of studies.

The General entered the room punctually to time, and (addressing the assembled soldiers said; Men, I have Been asked to unveil this tablet to perpetuate the memory of a soldier who, from all I have heard, did good honest work and endeared himself to all, so well thought of was he that when it was decided to send several non-commissioned officers to England to get the advantage of experience and special training, he was selected as one of those unfortunately, while on duty there he died. You, amongst whom he lived in early life, and with some of whom he commenced his military career, have done all you can by erecting this memorial. It is an object lesson to us all - young and old soldiers—and is a fitting tribute to his honesty, integrity and soldiery worth.

This tablet should be an incentive to all of you to do as Sergeant Fraser did—his duty. In time of peace it is sometimes harder to do one's duty than in time of war. Sergeant Fraser had his ideals— sometimes, somewhat shattered—but he had the heart to keep going, and at the end was found doing his duty to the country we all love so well. You have done right in erecting this tablet and given practical illustration that you bear in mind nothing but kind – remembrances of Sergeant-Major Fraser.

General Hoad, who was quite affected, unveiled the tablet, and after shaking hands with Sergeant Alexander Fraser (brother of the deceased officer) left the room. The tablet (a marble one), is inscribed as follows - Erected by his comrades of No.3 (Inverell) Squadron 6th A.L.H Regiment, to the memory of our late Reg. S.M. Fraser, who died in London June 8th 1907 – Inverell Argus

The Armidale Chronicle (N.S.W.) 12-6-1907

Death of Sergt-Major Fraser

The following Wire was received at local headquarters of the Australian Light Horse yesterday, afternoon "The Secretary for Defence advises that Sergt. Major Fraser died in London at 7 p.m. on. 8th June. Please advise widow and convey sympathy. The Minister, Board, General Staff, and Mr. H. Fraser, of Inverell (brother) have been informed."

[Sergeant-Major Fraser left Armidale nearly a year ago as one of two officers specially selected by the Commonwealth Government to undergo a course of advanced military training in light horse in England. He Was a very capable and zealous officer and was very highly thought of by his superiors in the service. He worked very hard in the organisation of the Light Horse in these parts, and was extremely popular with the rank and file, by whom his untimely demise will be greatly deplored. Sergeant Major Fraser leaves a widow and three children (one only six months old) – for whom universal sympathy is felt.]

Ancestor Details



Robert Fraser - AWM Painting

Ancestor's Name: Robert Donald Fraser

Ancestor's date of birth: 01/10/1873

Ancestor's date of death: 08/06/1907

Cause of Death: Pernicious Anemia

Service Number: 506

Colony or State of enlistment: NSW, *Place of Enlistment:* Tentfield NSW

Unit: 1st NSW Mounted Rifles, D Squadron

Rank attained in Boer War: CSGT, *Date Effective:* 1895

Highest Rank attained (if served after war): WO2, *Date Effective:* 1907

Murray Page: 67

Contingent: Second NSW Contingent

Ship: Southern Cross, *Date of Sailing:* 17/01/1900

Memorial details: Interred at the West Brompton Military Cemetery London UK

Awards/Decorations: Queen's South Africa Medal with Driefontein, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Wittenbergen, Cape Colony and SA 1901 clasps.

Personal Characteristics: He was born at Inverell NSW. He was a serving member of the 1st NSWMR. In 1895 he sat for examinations and passed for entry to his old unit as Staff Colour Sgt.

Reasons to go and fight: As one of 10 children, including 7 sons he needed to find employment off the property so he joined the volunteer units prior to the Boer War.

Details of service in war: February 1900 - March 1901 in Free State, Transvaal, and western Cape Colony including charge at Diamond Hill (12 June 1900).

Service and life after the Boer War: In 1904 he was classified as Staff Sgt Instructor Class 3 on the permanent instructional Staff. He was selected to go to England in 1906 to undergo training at Chatham and Aldershot. In 1907 he was classified as Staff Squadron Sgt Major, Class 3. After serving in the Boer War he probably acquired a Parasitic infection which led to his death from Pernicious Anemia in 1907 while training at Aldershot in Britain. A portrait, above, of Sgt Major Fraser (copy above) hangs in the boardroom of the Australian War Memorial Canberra, and was painted by well known Australian artist Tom Roberts. Sgt Major Fraser's portrait is one of a suite of full length portraits which Roberts painted on small wooden panels in the 1890's.

Descendant Details

Name of Descendant: Pearl Moffatt, Armidale NSW

Relationship to Ancestor: Great Niece

Living memories

Soldier's century old letters bring history alive

WARTIME VOICE: Pearl Moffatt and Ross Fraser read one of the letters their great uncle Robert wrote during the Boer War, which have survived for more than 100 years



By KAREN DAVIS

"I NEVER regret the trip, so far thank God and would not have missed it...although it is growing awfully monotonous now and longing for home we all are."

These lines were penned in 1900 by Sergeant Major Robert Fraser, great uncle of Armidale residents Ross Fraser and Pearl Fraser Moffatt, during the Boer War of 1899-1902, where he served in the NSW Mounted Rifles.

He wrote a series of letters home to his brother Dave, and his sister-in-law Bess, and these have survived over 100 years, only recently coming to light.

"I think you can picture my position best when I tell you that this November 2 is like one of New England's worst days," he wrote.

"Camped at the same place following a wet and miserable night, morning broke bringing

with it torrential rain, cold driving rain and wind. Oh, a wretched day for man and beast. No tents, no shelter save what you could rig up with your two blankets."

Ross Fraser said he had always known about the letters, but was pleased the find coincided with the Centenary of Federation.

"I always knew the letters existed but I only went through my family's things and found them a few weeks ago, which was appropriate timing. As I look through the rest of it, I'm sure other things will come to light," he said.

"They really are quite remarkable, they are descriptive and graphic, especially when he talks of the weather and the conditions. The Boer War was the first war Australia was involved in, so the letters are really part of history."

Mrs Moffatt said the letters were part of New England's history, as well as the nation's.

"Great uncle Robert was born in Inverell, based in Tenterfield and married Emma Hanlon of Armidale, so there are a lot of local connections. Even his horse Jerry was New England born and bred and there is speculation he may have brought the horse back with him when he returned," she said.

"But to me, the most special thing is holding these letters written more than 100 years ago, and reading about many members of our family."

A portrait of Sgt Mjr Fraser hangs in the boardroom of the War Memorial in Canberra, and was painted by well-known Australian artist Tom Roberts, possibly on the orders of Queen Victoria, who wanted a portrait of an officer in each of the colonial forces.

The Frasers will now seek advice on the best way of preserving the letters, before deciding where they should be housed.