

Ernest Carr



"No troops in the history of the world ever travelled further to fight a war." (Shadbolt, 1988:101).



Ernest Carr, c1912

Ernest Carr was born in Palmerston North, on 29 October 1893, third and youngest son of William and Sarah Jane (nee Bright) Carr. Sarah later married Richard Hart and she is named in her sons' army records as Mrs R Hart. (Sarah's mother, Eliza, was a sister of Thomas Cawthron, Nelson's philanthropic benefactor - the Church steps, School of Music organ, Rocks' Road chains, Nelson Public Hospital, Cawthron Institute, etc.)

The family subsequently moved back to Nelson and in his teens Dar, as he became known to his children and grandchildren (many of his friends knew him as Mick or Ernie), completed an apprenticeship as a wheelwright with J.F. Papps of Richmond. On returning from the war Dar married Norah Lammas (nee Norah Muller Hart), a widow with two young daughters, who became our aunties Dorrie (married Ray Beddow) and Phyl (married Jack Trainor). Two more daughters were born in 1919 and 1921: Sadie (married Pat Sharpin) and Patricia (married/divorced Lyall Andrew; married Keith Kitchin).

The document that follows includes a transcript of Dar's 1915 diary and is a record of his time in Egypt and on the Gallipoli Peninsular (sometimes referred to as the Dardanelles), from January to December 1915, as part of 12 (Nelson) Company, Canterbury Infantry Battalion.

Dar volunteered for service a few days after war was declared and left New Zealand in October 1914 with the 'Main Body'. He saw action at the Suez Canal on February 2, 1915 when 12 Nelson Company were among the first New Zealanders involved in a major action in World War One, before landing at Gallipoli on 25 April – ANZAC Day as it became. He left New Zealand as a private in Nelson Company's 9 Platoon and left Gallipoli as an acting Corporal in the Machine Gun Section of the Canterbury Infantry Battalion.

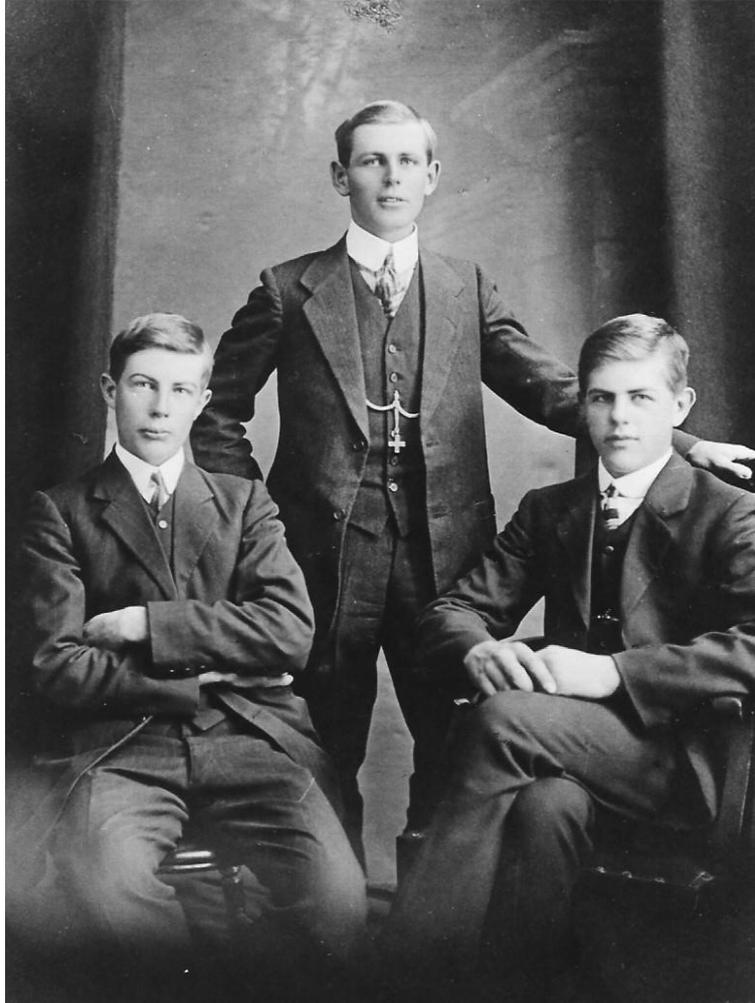
Dar survived the entire Gallipoli campaign unwounded, though not without getting ill, and was there until the evacuation of allied forces in December 1915. This was pretty unusual because of the high casualty and sickness rates and the poor diet. As New Zealand military historian Chris Pugsley (1998) notes, of the New Zealanders who served at Gallipoli, "only a very small percentage saw service in France and Palestine and these were mainly men of the later reinforcements". Our grandfather was one of this "small percentage", and one of very few to serve for the whole of the Gallipoli campaign, see action in France and survive the war.

In January 1916 Dar was transferred to No. 2 Company of the newly-formed New Zealand Machine Gun Corps (NZMGC) and was almost immediately promoted to sergeant. In early April 1916 he went to France as part of the NZ Division where he was badly wounded at the Somme on 20 September 1916 (this may account for there being, as far as we know, no diary for 1916). He was shipped to England on 25 September and hospitalised at No.1 NZ General Hospital, Brockenhurst (near Southampton), one of over 1300 New Zealand soldiers admitted to this hospital that month.

Dar's 1917 diary, however, does exist and it relates to his time in England as an instructor with the NZMGC based at Grantham in Lincolnshire. I have transcribed this diary separately and am now working on the accompanying explanatory notes,

using, amongst other sources, his army personnel records and those of the two older Carr brothers.¹

Dar's oldest brother, William Allan, a gunner with the NZ Field Artillery, spent some time at Gallipoli and was killed in action at the Somme on 7 October 1916. Brother Edward (Ted) also served in the NZMGC but survived the war, despite being gassed in France in June 1917 (presumably at Messines).



The Carr Brothers, c1910. L – R: Ted, Allan, Ernest

Both diaries have been in the care of Dar's oldest grandson, Michael Kitchin, for some years. Michael's late wife, Jan, first transcribed the 1915 diary in 1996. This current transcription, undertaken in 2003 and 2004 in conjunction with other related research, is based on Jan's work with some amendments where appropriate. I have also included additional material found in the back of the original diary and not previously transcribed. The diaries are small, pocket-sized books written in pencil, so in parts deciphering letters, or even words, is difficult. I have attempted to make the transcription as accurate as possible and taken considerable care to reproduce the original grammar and spelling. In a few places, however, I have inserted a word in square brackets to ensure the meaning is clear.

¹ See "Ernest Carr's Great War Story, Part Two"

Included with the transcript are 'Explanatory Notes' aimed at giving either a personal or historical/military context for particular entries. The notes also provide some background information covering the period August to December 1914 for which there is no diary as far as I'm aware, and a number of maps have been included. The original diary entries are printed here in ***bold italics***, the Explanatory Notes in normal print.

Although Dar was not a particularly eloquent diarist (most entries are no more than two or three sentences, many only one), a wide range of insights into life at Gallipoli are given or can be inferred. In addition, there are some fascinating comments - see the reference to Colonel Stewart and Major Grant on 25 April and Dar and Allan meeting on the beach the day Allan arrived with the 4th Reinforcements, June 14, for example.

For further reading on New Zealand's involvement in Egypt and Gallipoli in 1915 I recommend Christopher Pugsley's books, especially "Gallipoli: The New Zealand Story" (1998). Also "ANZAC: A Retrospect" by Cecil Malthus (a 9 Platoon, Nelson Company veteran), first published in 1965 and republished in 2002. Maurice Shadbolt's "Voices of Gallipoli" (1988), featuring interviews with Gallipoli veterans in the early 1980s, including one with a Nelson Company man (Hartley Palmer), is well worth reading. Aussie journalist Les Carlyon's "Gallipoli" is a wonderfully informative and entertaining read, and Terry Kinloch's "Echoes of Gallipoli", published only a few months ago and focusing on the NZ Mounted Rifles, has received positive reviews. These books and others I have used are fully referenced on page 62.

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Phil Sharpin
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