



FIRST OF THE N.Z. EXPEDITION-
ARY FORCE TO BE KILLED IN
ACTION: PRIVATE W. A. HAM,
OF MOTUEKA, NELSON, FATALLY
WOUNDED IN THE SUEZ CANAL
ENGAGEMENT ON FEBRUARY 3.

William Arthur Ham (6/246)

FAMILY

William Arthur Ham was born in Ireland on 14 April 1892. In 1900 his parents, William Edward Ham and Hester Hawthorne Ham moved their family from Ireland and set off for New Zealand. William Ham senior suffered a chronic weakness of the lungs and it was hoped the move would improve his health. On board the *Athenic*, the family arrived in New Zealand in October with their three sons, William (Bill), Harry and Jack, they settled in Gisborne. However, in 1905 they moved to the small rural settlement of Ngatimoti, near Motueka, although the family also lived at different times in Pokororo, Motueka and Waiwhero. Three more sons, Cyril, Ralph and Ernest were born in New Zealand.¹

1914

Bill Ham was working as a labourer for the Waimea County Council survey team when war was declared on 5 August 1914. The former cadet and keen territorial soldier enlisted 10 days later, one of 14 Ngatimoti men to do so. The 22-year old private embarked from Wellington with the main body of the Canterbury Infantry Battalion on 16 October 1914. On board the *Athenic*, the same ship that brought the Ham family to New Zealand, the men reached Suez, Egypt on 3 December.² The joint Australian and New Zealand contingent set up camp at Zeitoun, just outside Cairo, and underwent extensive training and when off duty they went sightseeing.³

1915

On 3 February 1915 the New Zealand Infantry Brigade was engaged in repulsing a Turkish attack on the Suez Canal. The 12th (Nelson) Company was in the midst of the action when Bill Ham was hit by a bullet, which ricocheted off his rifle and hit his neck, breaking his spine. He died of his wounds on the evening of 5 February, becoming the first New Zealander to be killed on active service in the war. Fellow Ngatimoti man, Major Cyprian Bridge Brereton, held a funeral service with the whole 12th Company in attendance. Instead of being buried in a mass grave with others killed in the battle, Bill was buried with full military honours in the Ismalia European cemetery.⁴

Writing a letter of condolence to Bill's mother, Major Brereton noted the young man was "an ideal soldier... in action splendid, happy and cool".⁵

So early on in the war, Bill's death was given prominence in Nelson newspapers, something unable to be accorded all those who died as the war continued and the casualty list rapidly increased.⁶

Unfortunately, the shock of Bill's death, combined with the war-related deaths of four Irish family members,⁷ is said to have contributed to the death of William Ham snr, who died in Nelson Hospital on 19 March 1915 after a short illness.⁸

Bill's brother, Thomas Henry Merrick (Harry) Ham (2/3004 – 69164), was not deterred from enlisting in December by his brother's death. Harry survived World War One. [He died of illness during World War Two on 1 February 1942 during active service in the Pacific.⁹]

1916

In 1916 Bill Ham's widowed mother Hester remarried but her second husband, a Ngatimoti farmer, Cyril Montague Bartlett (33677 - 69164), enlisted not long after.

1917

Private Cyril Bartlett embarked for England on 19 January 1917 with C Company of the 21st Reinforcements, Canterbury Infantry Battalion. From Plymouth he moved to the Western Front, where he was killed in action at Ypres on 15 December 1917.¹⁰

Hester later settled in Dunedin with her family and died there in 1947.¹¹

Of the 14 men who enlisted from Ngatimoti, 11 were killed in action or died of their wounds, one died of sickness and only two lived to return to New Zealand, although both were wounded. Friends and family of the men erected a memorial to them at St James Church, Ngatimoti.¹²

¹ Anne McFadgen, Private William Ham - <http://www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/private-william-arthur-ham/#.U3P4yii5Ejo>

² Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph records for William Ham, <http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/locations.aspx?>

³ Anne McFadgen, Private William Ham - <http://www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/private-william-arthur-ham/#.U3P4yii5Ejo>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Anne McFadgen, Private William Ham - <http://www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/private-william-arthur-ham/#.U3P4yii5Ejo>

⁶ Nelson's Roll of Honour, Nelson Evening Mail, 8 Feb 1915, p.5.

⁷ Anne McFadgen, Private William Ham - <http://www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/private-william-arthur-ham/#.U3P4yii5Ejo>

⁸ William E Ham, Deaths, Colonist, 20 March 1915, p.6 & Late Locals, Nelson Evening Mail, 19 March 1915, p 6.

⁹ Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph records for Thomas Henry Merrick (Harry) Ham,
<http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/locations.aspx?>

¹⁰ Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph records for Cyril Montague Bartlett,
<http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/locations.aspx?>

¹¹ Anne McFadgen, Private William Ham - <http://www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/private-william-arthur-ham/#.U3P4yii5Ejo>

¹² Anne McFadgen, Private William Ham - <http://www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/private-william-arthur-ham/#.U3P4yii5Ejo>

This researched Biography was compiled by Karen Stade, Nelson Provincial Museum, in 2014.