William Neal (service # 7/246)and Percy Neal (service # 7/244)

Having his beloved horse shot dead on the battlefields of the Western Front and being given a donkey as a replacement was an experience Percy Neal never got over.[1] Both he and his older brother William left their family farm in the Rai Valley with their horses but only Percy returned home.

The farm labourer brothers were the oldest sons of farmers Charlie and Mary Neal (nee Boon), who had a family of six children: William (known as Will - born 1885), Ella (1887), Percy (1890), Malvina (Vi - 1894), Leonard (Len -1899) and Arnold Maxwell (Max - 1901).

The five oldest children were born in Koromiko, near Picton, before the family moved to Mahakipawa, near Linkwater in 1900, where Max was later born. In 1907 the family successfully applied for a section in the Rimu Valley (near Carluke in the Rai Valley) land ballot,[2] Will and Percy riding their racing mounts Farlee Bell and Campfire from Mahakipawa to the Rai on moving day. The farm was situated opposite the Rai Village on the eastern side of the Rai River and was later expanded when Charlie acquired two adjoining sections.[3]

When World War I broke out in 1914, William, already part of the 10th (Nelson) Mounted Rifles, immediately sought to enlist. However he was apparently turned down at the Marlborough recruiting office because of his flat feet. Determined to do his bit for the war he persuaded Percy to go with him to Nelson to enlist. There he used his brother's medical records to hoodwink enlistment officers into accepting him on 15 August 1914, just 10 days after war was declared.[4]

Troopers Will (service number 7/246) and Percy (7/244) Neal enlisted in the 10th (Nelson) Squadron of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles and embarked from Lyttelton with the main body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force on 16 October 1914,[5] on board the *SS. Ruapehu*, arriving in Alexandria, Egypt on 3 December. With them were their own much-loved horses, Campfire and Farlee Bell. They join the troops at a training camp at Zeitoun.

A photograph in Egypt of Percy with two companions on camelback in front of the Sphinx illustrates the adventure many young New Zealand men yearned for when they enlisted. However, on July 7 the brothers embarked for the Dardanelles to join the battle at Gallipoli. In August 1915 they brothers found themselves on Gallipoli's Sari Bair Range without their horses (which were left behind in Egypt), where they were part of two columns of men charged with capturing three key high-points, including Chunuk Bair.[6]

On the night of 6-7 August the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade took Table Top and Bauchop's Hill and retook Old No. 3 Post,[7] but amongst the brigade's casualties was Will Neal, killed on Bauchop Hill, aged 30.[8] The events of that night were later described in a clipping from an unnamed or dated Christchurch newspaper, by John Fogarty, who fought alongside the Neal brothers.[9]

"A Soldier and a Man - The locality is Gallipoli. After being between No. - Outpost and the line rank for some time we were ordered to relieve the troop on Walker's Ridge. We took over on a Sunday night, which was the usual day for changing over, and went into the firing line straight away. Of course there was much sniping in the flashes from 'Johnny Turk's' rifle.

"As usual we stood to arms an hour before daylight. Later we were relieved and went into the support trench. Between the support and the firing line there was a small communication trench about six yards. Orders were given to the effect that any man wounded was to be left, as every fit man was needed when we reached our goal. Before we got there, however, poor Bill [Will] caught it in the chest. My bayonet was shot off and a bullet had passed through the woodwork of my rifle. I fell into a Turkish trench and had to be helped out of it. Our objective had at last been taken and we were relieved two hours after daylight. I set out to look for Bill and found that he had 'gone west'. Need I say that I was very sorry? Bill had a mother somewhere in the South Island and I regret I do not know her. She reared a fine son – a soldier, and a man. John Fogarty."

The lasting impact of her oldest son's death was revealed many years later when Mary Neal was asked in the lead up to the family's Christmas festivities, "What would you like to do Grandma?" Her quiet reply revealed the wound that had never healed: "It doesn't matter, I'll fit in with whatever is planned. There's never been a Christmas for me since I lost Will."[10]

Charlie Neal died in Nelson in 1936 and his wife Mary in 1944. They lie buried together in Wakapuaka Cemetery, their gravestone also inscribed with the name of their son Will, though he lies buried somewhere at Gallipoli.[11] His name is also on the Chunuk Bair Memorial at Gallipoli.[12]

Percy Neal received slight wounds[13] in the Gallipoli peninsula battle that killed his brother Will and after a short stay in hospital returned to active service. However, his remaining three months on the Gallipoli Peninsula saw him in and out of casualty clearing stations and hospitals suffering in turn enteritis, gastritis, jaundice and diarrhoea before he was finally shipped out to England on 25 November 1915 and admitted to hospital. [14]

On 24 March 1916 he was fit enough to rejoin the Canterbury Mounted Rifles in Kantara, Egypt, alongside the Suez Canal, where he and the other returning mounted rifles were reunited with their horses.[15] His unit was now in the Anzac Mounted Division, which had formed that month consisting of the Australian 1st, 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade.[16] The division was within the Desert Column of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (E.E.F), and under the command of Major General Edward Chaytor of Motueka.[17]

The Anzac Mounted Division remained in the Middle East while the rest of the New Zealand Division left Egypt for France[18] and was engaged in defending the Suez Canal against Turkish assault, winning most of the major battles across the Sinai Peninsula in 1916.[19] One task was providing defence for the construction of a new

railway east towards Sinai and Palestine, which had begun at Kantara in January 1916.[20]

In mid-1917 the column was expanded and renamed the Desert Mounted Corps, fighting from Gaza to Jerusalem in southern Palestine.[21] On 5 November Percy wounded in action in the foothills around Ras el Nagb, receiving a gunshot wound to the right knee. His injury came during a Turkish attack in which the Canterbury Mounted Rifles were outgunned, their 18 pounder guns having been replaced by 13 pounders, which were unable to counter the heavy Turkish fire.[22]

It is not known when in Percy's Sinai/Palestine service that his horse Farley Bell was killed and he was issued with a donkey as replacement. But the desert conditions for both men and their mounts (which also included camels and mules) were tough, as the Canterbury Mounted Rifles history records for the day Percy was injured. "No rations or fodder had been issued on the 5th, and In addition to being tired out everybody was hungry and suffering from the lack of water. The shortage of water was a serious matter for the horses, they having had none since early the day before. There still being no sign of the relieving brigade, it was finally decided to send the horses to Beersheba. After a long, weary ride, with tired men and exhausted animals, very little water was available there. Seemingly every animal in the desert Mounted Column was at Beersheba for water. Camels, donkeys, mules and horses were mixed up in hopeless confusion. The engineers, in an effort to cope with the rush, set a time limit for each unit. This being much too short, owing to sufficient pumps not being available to keep the troughs full, many animals got no water at all." [23]

The injured Percy was admitted to hospital in Heliopolis and was back on duty a month later, rejoining his unit and continuing his service in the desert through 1918. However in October and November 1918 Percy was admitted several times to hospital in Egypt with malaria, contracted in Jericho (on the Palestinian West Bank).[24] It was the malaria which saw him repatriated to New Zealand on board the *Wiltshire*, which embarked on 26 December.[25]

Percy spent a month as an outpatient of Nelson Hospital, travelling from his Marlborough home at Flat Creek to Nelson for treatment. He was discharged from military service by a medical board on 11 April 1919, which cited the ongoing effects of his "malarial debility" and granting him an initial six month pension. [26]

In 1920 Percy married Sarah Gardiner from Tua Marina and the couple farmed his soldier's allotment in the Tunakino Valley, northeast of the Rai Valley. However, they found it difficult to make a living off the sheep farm and eventually walked off the farm. Moving their young family, Reg, Gwen, Dorothy, Daphne and Colleen, to Upper Moutere, Percy and Sarah grew hops.[27]

Sadly, Sarah died aged just 42 in 1944. He was aged 84 when he died in 1974. Both are buried in Wakapuaka Cemetery.[28]

Amongst Percy's wartime possessions was the newspaper clipping describing his brother's death and a Turkish medal, said to have been given to him by a Turkish prisoner-of-war in return for a drink of water.[29]

This joint Biography of the Neal boys was researched and prepared by Karen Stade in 2014 with the support of the Neal family.

[1] Conversation with Gwen Wright, 21 July 2014.

[2] Kerry Neal, information supplied to Karen Stade, July 2014.

[3] Pearl Neal, Neal family history: William II and Martha Neal 1842, p.15.

[4] Tracy Neal, 'Brave Brothers in Arms', *Nelson Mail*, 24 April 2010, p.15.

[5] William James Neal and Percy Edward Neal, service records, National Archives of New Zealand.

[6] Alan Moorehead, *Gallipoli*, Darlinghurst, Australia: Mead & Beckett, revised 1989, p.232.

[7] Gallipoli Campaign Timeline, http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/the-gallipoli-campaign/timeline

[8] William James Neal, Cenotaph Record, http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph

[9] Pearl Neal, Neal family history: William II and Martha Neal 1842, p.24.

[10] Pearl Neal, Neal family history: William II and Martha Neal 1842, p.24.

[11] Pearl Neal, Neal family history: William II and Martha Neal 1842, p.33.

[12] William James Neal, military service record, National Archives of New Zealand.

[13] Percy Edward Neal, military service record, National Archives of New Zealand.

[14] Percy Edward Neal, military service record, National Archives of New Zealand.

15

Who's Who - Edward Chaytor, First World War.Com, A Multimedia History of World War One,

http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/chaytor.htm

[16] 'The Campaign in the Middle East', World War One, Anzac Day,
http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/overview/mideast.html

17

Who's Who - Edward Chaytor, First World War.Com, A Multimedia History of World War One,

http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/chaytor.htm

[18] 'Western Front: New Zealand's First World War Horses', in New Zealand History Online,
http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/nz-first-world-war-horses/western-front

[19] Anzac Mounted Division, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ANZAC_Mounted_Division

[20] Kantara Cemetery, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/54500/KANTARA%20WAR%20MEMORIAL%20CEMETERY

[21] Anzac Mounted Division, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ANZAC_Mounted_Division

[22] Colonel C. G. Powles, The History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles 1914-1919, p, 172,
http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH1CMRi-t1-body-d13.html

[23] Colonel C. G. Powles, The History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles 1914-1919, p, 172,
http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH1CMRi-t1-body-d13.html

[24] William James Neal, Cenotaph Record, http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph

[25] Percy Edward Neal, military service record, National Archives of New Zealand.

[26] Percy Edward Neal, military service record, National Archives of New Zealand.

[27] Conversation with Gwen Wright, 21 July 2014.

[28] Sarah Neal and Percy Neal, Nelson Cemeteries Database,
http://nelson.govt.nz/services/facilities/cemeteries/cemeteries-database-2/

[29] Conversation with Gwen Wright, 21 July 2014.