

## WWI - Thomas Michael Carrucan

Thomas Michael Carrucan, born 1892, was the eldest of the 6 children born to Michael and Margaret Carrucan of Kew and was thus one of the grand children of Peter Carrucan and Hannah Woods.



**Thomas Michael served in the First World War**

In 1914 when World War One broke out, many young Australian men enlisted. In 1915 Thomas Michael Carrucan was one of these. Thomas passed his medical and was then sent to Broadmeadows, a suburb of Melbourne, for training. This was after taking the oath to serve the King in the Australian Imperial Force. Thomas' medical report shows that he was 5 feet 10.5 inches, weighed 11 stone, had a chest measurement of 33/37, a fresh complexion, brown eyes, brown hair, was a Roman Catholic, and that he had a scar on his left knee.

The war records at 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne show the following:

SERVICE NO.	RANK	UNIT	ENLISTED
1087	PTE	A.PROV.C	08-07-1915.

At Broadmeadows, Thomas was approved by the commanding officer, a lieutenant colonel, to join "D" Company 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade.

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 1915, he embarked on H.M.A.T. *Kabinga* in Melbourne and sailed for Suez on 14<sup>th</sup> November. His war records show that he then sailed from Alexandria on the *Tunisian* and landed at Marseilles, France on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1916. He was soon in action as his unit was in the battle of Fromelles, which occurred on 19-20 July of that same year.

The following account of the battle is taken from *Australian Battlefields of the Western Front* by John Laffin.

*"Despite inadequate artillery bombardment, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Brigades crossed No Man's Land, stormed the enemy's front trenches and broke through. No Man's Land was from 100 metres to 450 metres wide and without cover for the attackers. The British on the Australians' right failed to capture their objective. Then the Brigades captured the German second line, hundreds of metres beyond the first line. As the hours passed, the Australians steadily lost officers and men to every type of German fire. A supporting attack by the 61<sup>st</sup> Division was cancelled, leaving the Australians surrounded in the trenches they*

*had captured.<sup>i</sup>*

The book *Don't Forget Me, Cobber: The Battle of Fromelles<sup>ii</sup>* is recommended reading for any Peter Line Carrucans. Some of the facts about Fromelles have actually taken 90 plus years to be revealed. We are fortunate that Thomas Michael survived what was arguably the worst day in Australian military history.

Later Thomas served with the 67<sup>th</sup> Battalion 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Later again, after being wounded and declared unfit for trench warfare, Thomas served in a London postal unit, and then was transferred to the Anzac Provost Corps. He served in London, France and finally Belgium, where he was at the war's ending.

There is no date of Thomas' return to Australia as he, along with many others, was kept abroad to help with the movement of troops, equipment, etc., for some time after the end of the war. He was eventually discharged in March 1920.

On Thomas' return from the war, there was no place in the family business for him and he had to look elsewhere for work. Even worse, there was no bedroom for him in the family home. The three main bedrooms were occupied by his parents, his sisters and his two brothers Frank and Leo. As it turned out, he slept in the stables because he suffered from nightmares due, of course, to his wartime experiences. This arrangement allowed the other family members to get a good night's rest.

When times became tough, Thomas and his younger brother Leo took on pick and shovel work. Each person had a quota and when Thomas had done his, he would do the remaining part of Leo's. This was because other men were standing around waiting to take the place of anyone who failed to do his quota. Tom was stronger than Leo at that stage of their lives. The job was quite different to the one he had when he was a young boy. Then Thomas would go to the Kew Cemetery and hold the horses of those attending a funeral. That was his pocket money.

Sometime after his return to Australia and civilian life, Thomas' medals went missing. This made him very angry and, according to his son Peter, he left home and started working on ships plying their trade between Australia and New Zealand.

Eventually, he decided to settle in New Zealand where he had a mate. Once there, he met and married Agnes Conolly and they had 13 children.

Back in Kew, Thomas' mother Margaret and his sister Kathleen spent a lot of time sewing clothes for the huge New Zealand family. Thomas, like so many of his day, did not have a higher education and his work in New Zealand as a tram driver would not have been highly paid. I was a woolclasser but always had, and still have at the age of 81, the desire to drive a tram so I envy my cousin Thomas.

I've been told that Thomas' personality was very like his father's - he spoke to anyone, got along well with people, and was a hard worker. He had green fingers - his vegetable garden was something to see! He gave lots of what he'd grown away.

Thomas died on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1951 in an Auckland hospital. I wish that I'd had the opportunity to know him. Sometime after his death, his wife visited Victoria and stayed with Kathleen Clements for a few days.

It's good to look back on those who have gone and remember them for their contribution to life and perhaps learn something from the things they did. I'm sure we, his kin, will always have the greatest respect for Thomas Michael Carrucan.

### **Family Life ~ Thomas and Beryl Carrucan <sup>iii</sup>**

Here is a glimpse of the family life of Thomas and Beryl Carrucan. Thomas served in the World War I from November 1915 to March 1920. He went to New Zealand in 1922 where he met and married Agnes Beryl Connolly. Thomas died in March 1951, aged 58 years. Thomas and Beryl raised 13 children - Leo, Joe, Ted, Brian, Mary, Kathleen, Robert, Maura, Peter, Andrew, Janet, Elizabeth and Anne.

After marrying, Beryl and Thomas first lived in Wallace Street, Ponsonby, before settling at Muripara Avenue, Point Chevalier. Their home was a wooden bungalow of five bedrooms. It had a road frontage and extensive backyard, allowing the nurture of a vegetable garden, animals and subsequently a secondary wooden dwelling of an Army Hut. This latter was built to allow for room for the older sons Leo, Joe and Ted.

Family plants included white roses, a lemon tree and various other fruit trees. Thomas provided well for the family by maintaining a vegetable garden which produced huge pumpkins and a steady supply of tomatoes and greens.

Of memory is the story often told by Thomas that the pumpkins were so large that they could be used to build/chip a garage out of them. And of course the tomatoes were as big as pumpkins themselves. A task remembered by Maura and Mary was the tulling of the peas prior to the cooking of a roast dinner.

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<sup>i</sup> Contributed by Louise Carrucan Wood, March 2004

<sup>ii</sup> *Don't Forget Me, Cobber: The Battle of Fromelles*, by Robin S. Corfield (Author), Les Carlyon (Foreword)

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<sup>iii</sup> Contributed by Louise Carrucan Wood, March 2004