

The Grubb Brothers of Stanley

Francis Rochford Grubb was born on the 27th of June, 1888, in Stanley, Tasmania. His younger brother, William Edward Kemp Grubb, was born two years later, on the 13th of November, 1890. Their parents were Archibald and Marian Grubb.

The Grubb Family

Archibald Francis Grubb was born and raised in 1835 in Fermoy, Ireland, and immigrated to Australia in 1853. He joined Victorian Police as a cadet during the gold rush, where he was involved in the Eureka Stockade rebellion and once escorted the infamous bushranger Daniel Morgan to court. He joined the Tasmanian Police in 1862, becoming the Chief District Constable of the West District.

Archibald married Marian (possibly Mary Ann) Kemp in 1866. After moving to Stanley in 1867, **they had 11 children**; in order of birth, their names were Catherine, Annie, Mary, Florence, Archibald Jr., Eveline, James, Helen, George, Francis and William. The Grubb children all attended Stanley Public School.

The Grubbs belonged to the Church of England. Archibald was a **highly esteemed and respected** man, and was a weekly columnist in the Examiner after retiring in 1893.

Marian died on the 23rd of July 1892, at the age of 42. At her funeral, she had “*one of the largest assembly of mourners*” seen in Stanley. Francis was four years old when she died. William was not even two.

One of the Grubb kids, named Archibald James Grubb, also died, at the age of 25, in 1900. He “*passed quietly away... after a very trying and long illness.*” (Advocate, 19 June 1900).

William's Career

After leaving school, William (more commonly known as Bill) was “employed for some time by the firm of Lean & Smith, and afterwards occupied a position of trust with the house, of Maples, Launceston” (Circular Head Chronicle, 10 April 1916).

‘Lean & Smith’ was a business partnership in Stanley at the time. They owned a bakery where the chemist is currently located, a general store in the current Stanley Hotel carpark, and an agricultural store where Stanley Supermarket is. (Betty Jones, *Along the Terrace*, 2015)

At some point after working in Stanley, William **moved to Launceston**. On his enlistment papers, he listed his occupation as “commercial traveller”, which he presumably did for Maples, a furniture shop chain located on Brisbane Street, Launceston.

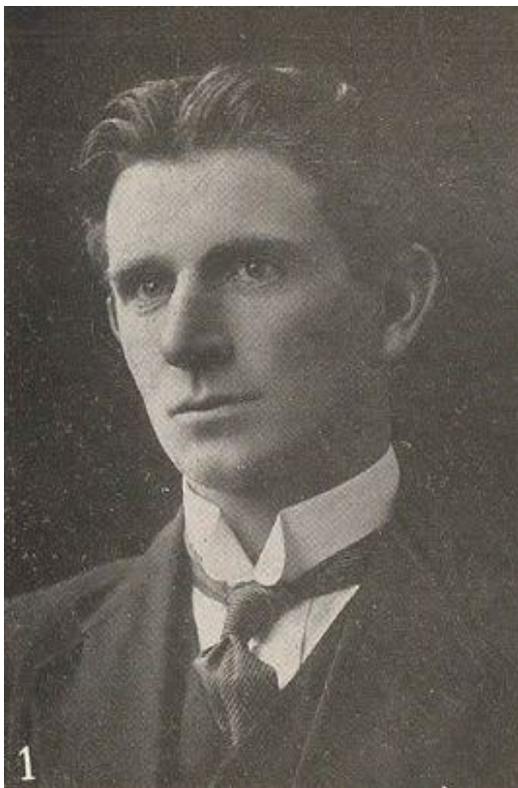


Figure 1: Portrait of William Edward Kemp Grubb

Francis's Career and Misdemeanours

In his early twenties, Francis led “*an exemplary life*” without a “*stain on his character*”. He worked in the Stanley Postal Department as a messenger and later clerk. He was “*...possessed of scholarly attainments, being a beautiful penman and good at figures.*” Frank, as he was commonly known, “*...was a **leading cornet player** in the [Stanley Brass Band], and also an **adept at football and cricket.***” (Circular Head Chronicle, 23 August 1916).

But Frank's life took a turn for the worst in 1909, when **he fell ill with chronic dysentery**. No remedies would help. In a moment of desperation, he hearkened to a friend's advice of taking the drug chlorodyne. Chlorodyne contains opium, chloroform and cannabis. It gave him relief, but also **addicted him to a horrid extent**. He began pushing away his family, friends and pastimes. It got to the point where he was taking a bottle a day.

Early in 1910, Francis “*found himself without the means of obtaining the drug*”, and as an awful consequence of his demoralisation, he began to steal money from postal articles at the post office where he worked. It eventually **led to his arrest**. On the 14th of October, he was tried in Stanley, for 3 charges of embezzlement, and was sentenced to 2 months for each charge after pleading guilty. Whilst in gaol, his illness returned.

On the 15th of November, he was tried in Launceston, for the ‘Larceny of Postal Matters’. An extensively signed petition, which even the Warden of Circular Head signed, bore “*witness to his previous good conduct, and **the esteem in which he was held in the district***”. He was defended by Mr. Tasman Shields (who later became an independent MLC). The merciful

judge sentenced him to a concurrent 4 months, which meant no additional time to his current sentence.

A newspaper article about the trial said that when he was released from jail, Francis's "...*friends and relatives were going to get him away to another state, in order to start afresh, and become a better man...*" (North-West Post, 16 Nov 1910).

However, after being freed and returning to good health, Francis stayed in Tasmania, and was **given a hairdressing job** by his brother James, who owned a barber shop on the main street of Stanley, where Providore 24 currently is.

The entire transcript of the Stanley court proceedings was put in the Circular Head Chronicle (19 Oct 1910), available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/160987681>

Links to shorter reports of the court case can be found here:

- North-West Post: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/202028551>
- Daily Telegraph: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/152260211>
- NW Advocate: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/64523087>



Figure 2: Mugshot of Francis Rochford Grubb

William's journey to Gallipoli

On the 4th of August, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany, and Australia immediately avowed their support. On the 25th of April, 1915, the first ANZAC troops landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula, in Turkey.

Not long after the landings, William enlisted at Claremont on the 11th of May, 1915, aged 24. His medical examination says he had a height of 5'9", blue eyes, brown hair, and an operation scar on the right side of his back.

William joined the 26th Battalion (part of 7th Brigade, 2nd Division), which had members from Tasmania and Queensland. His number was 996, and his rank was Private. The Battalion left from Brisbane on board the HMAT *Aeneas* on June 29th, 1915.

Throughout his journey, he detailed his experiences prolifically in his diary. As you will soon see, William was a beautiful but sometimes humorous writer. His diary was sent home after his death. In the 1930s, the Australian War Memorial borrowed his diary, and transcribed sections of it. Because of this, the diary entries are very much not complete.

"Embarkation from Australia at 2pm. We were on parade in full marching order and waiting for the command to move off. All around the entrance to the Camp, a crowd of Queenslanders had assembled to bid farewell to the 'Disorderly Tasmanians' and to wish them God speed."

"We left wharf to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" and the cheers of the civilian crowd... altogether the scene did much to inspire our boys with the feeling of heroes... and now as I write this, sitting on the upper deck leaning on the railing, the sun is getting low down and across the sea from the Island to the stern of our vessel, for we are going nearly East again now, a glorious golden column is thrown and in this the waves are dancing as though for joy. The picture now is grand and the colouring of the sky exquisite..."

...and now as I sit and watch the closing of this the first day out from Brisbane, the first day spent on a troopship, I feel a sense of loneliness steal over me and yet it is good to be lonely sometimes because it brings sweetness in its trail and as the sun sinks, I stop writing and with eyes on the hills and my thoughts... I sing softly to myself..."

After stopping in Sydney, the HMAT Aeneas arrived in the Suez Canal in late July / early August. According to William, "*Indian soldiers are stationed all along here as guards, a fine bright tough looking lot of men*".

They trained in Egypt for about a month. On the first day of September, William wrote...

*"...There is a feeling of silent excitement in and around the camp as the time draws near while an occasional fight breaks the silence and relieves the tightened nerves... Now the time is drawing close I feel calm and fit and just a little bit eager to get out and into the line of fire – avenge some of the wrongs committed on defenceless women. **I shall hate to take life but I feel justified and wreaking vengeance** on these allies of the Unspeakable, though "cultured", Huns..."*

*"...If some of the pleasure loving Johnnies could come over to this side of the world and learn what stupendous task we have undertaken or had forced on us, for they don't learn true facts in Australia. This is no idle talk. We who see thousands of wounded in the hospitals here and the hundreds coming in daily, are in a position to speak, and as I say **could the Theatre Johnnies in Australia see and know these disfigured and broken-down heroes and then see the blood-soaked Peninsula of Gallipoli they would hesitate no longer, but would put away their toys and take up a gun.***

*"I can assure anyone who may read these rough notes, though written in deadly earnest, **that for the next year and probably the year following, every available man will be wanted, not only from Australia but from almost every country under the civilised flag, to quell the rush of these bloody and awful Prussian Junker, and the man that makes up his***

mind now and goes to the front, no matter how rough, quickly, is worth two who hesitate and hang on for 2 or 3 months. In my humble opinion, I think a lot of things will have to be crowded in and rushed through during the next 3 months that should take months, but owing to the approach of winter we will have to be worked hard or else stand the chance of being starved or frozen to death and we do not want this..."

They left Egypt on the 6th of September, stopping at the Greek island of Lemnos the next day. William described Lemnos as *"...a picture that few of us will ever forget. It also serves to remind us how near we are to the actual and real thing. The distance now amounts to miles only."*

Whilst in Lemnos, the soldiers relaxed: swimming in the Mediterranean, boat racing, and preparing for combat. Around this time a gland in William's knee was infected, which he described as very painful.

He occasionally mentions the names of his mates, including an 'Old Murray' from Cataract Hill, who was lazy and dopey but very affectionate towards William, following him everywhere. Others include Aubrey Appleby of Hobart, who survived the war, was married and died in 1934.

William's service in Gallipoli

They landed at Gallipoli on the night of the 10th September 1916, at Anzac Cove, where the first ANZACs infamously landed. *"In landing we were lucky... The bullets dropped around us, but not a man was hit..."*

A few days later, William wrote that *"...as we came across some open ground at 4 o'clock this morning, the scent of new slain dead was in the air and I walked on something squashy. I kept my eyes straight ahead and tried to think of things less*

gruesome...I went down towards the beach where the well is for water and while was shot at again. This time the bullet fell 22 yards in front of me. I didn't take much notice of this as I seem to have got used them as they fly all around and among us..."

William describes Gallipoli as gruesome and sad, but also exciting. On the 14th of September 1915, he wrote that "...the Turks sending shrapnel down here wholesale and it afforded great excitement for our chaps dodging the shrapnel. Appleby and I were cooking tea and it was very funny despite the danger.

*"We would cut an onion then duck into the dugout for our lives, then out again give it a stir and in again as a shell would come whistling by and the bullets singing by sometimes so close as to almost be felt, and **we were laughing all through because it was comical**... Big guns, both on land and sea are sending out messages of death, and the Turks are replying with vigour..."*

Bill also mentioned a divide between English and Australian soldiers. According to him, on the evening of the 16th of September, "two English Tommies were bringing a wounded chap in on a stretcher and the Turks started shelling them and when they heard the shrapnel coming, they dropped the stretcher and ran for cover, while two Australians ran out and brought the wounded man in from where he had fallen from the stretcher. **The Indians do not like the Tommies at all and simply swear by the Australians.** There is no doubt the Australians are a great body of soldiers and almost fearless."

Two weeks later, he wrote that "...the Australians are worshipped here, Indians swear by them, and the English

officers have to admit for grit and work they beat anything. The Major in command of the beach said yesterday that he was pleased with the way we shaped and wished he had had Australians here sooner.”

In an eery prediction of the future, William wrote of Gallipoli, that, “...no doubt this will someday be a fashionable seaside and holiday place for tourists who will come to see the place on which their dead heroic friends and relatives fought and “They shall know them by their bones upon the way.” Another interesting anecdote is Bill reading aloud to his mates, late at night. “It is ‘The Virginian’, a tale of the West, just the sort of tale to interest soldiers and I can tell you my mates appreciate my reading to them as they can lay and smoke while listening. We read two or three chapters each night and will keep on doing so while we can...”

On the 7th of October, William wrote that “...the attack is over and the big guns silent and only the usual rifle fire can be heard now, so I think I will go to sleep and try and dream I am back in Tasmania and on the banks of the South Esk eating bananas neath the shade of its glorious willows as I did one summer day not long ago. Even out here **I find time to look back on the pleasant parts of life and who say what pleasure it brings to a tired heart.**”

William’s sickness

Diseases were rampant among soldiers in Gallipoli. “Out here in this accursed East, one can be the best of health and the pink of condition at noon and by midnight can be dying. I tell

*you, out here we soldiers have to be on guard continuously against fever and dysentery. Last evening a chap left here for the hospital with the latter complaint and by midnight was nearly dead. I have seen men here strong and big and healthy one day and **in a week's time they have been walking skeletons**. This is no exaggeration as many other can verify.*

“God help Frank if he ever gets here. He is very delicate and less able to stand these than I. Today I have been ill all day and working just the same. In military circles it is a crime to be sick, but today I care nothing for the pain or anything bodily for I have received two letters from my darling...”

His brother Frank had already experienced dysentery before the war, as previously mentioned. In mid-November, William himself caught a serious fever.

On the 12th, he was admitted to the No.12 or 13 Clearing Station. While there, William lay “...on a stretcher along with 11 other chaps for seven days while the Turks took “pot shots” at us with high explosive shells and shrapnel and at night when the firing in the trenches commenced, we used to get more than a comfortable amount of the bullets that went high above the trenches. The first few days 2 men were killed and several wounded and we made up our minds that **instead of coming here to be cured we stood a fair chance of being killed.**”

After being diagnosed with a fever, Bill was shipped back to Alexandria, Egypt, on the 23rd of November. On the 30th, he admitted to the First Australian General Hospital at Heliopolis, near Cairo, where he stayed for a month. On New Years Day, 1916, William was taken to a “convalescence camp” at Port Said, on the Suez Canal, after being diagnosed with enteric fever, a.k.a. typhoid. He stayed there for nearly three weeks. By

the end of January, William disembarked from Suez on the troopship HMAT Commonwealth, on a voyage back home.

Whilst onboard, Bill's "...hardest work at present is in curbing my impatience. I get into a fever heat sometimes and feel as if **I cannot wait for the time to come when I will find myself on Tasmanian soil.** It seems years instead of months since I left and went West, still I think 5 weeks must come and go ere I see even Australia in all the glory of her summer cloak, or will she be clad in the more sombre gowns of Autumn?"



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H18510

Figure 3: First Australian General Hospital at Heliopolis, Cairo, with patients from Gallipoli

Here is a diary entry that Bill penned on his voyage home:

"...That grim spectre stalks the earth day and night these times and some must fall foul of him, "God grant these may be few", and yet this home coming is not untouched by sadness 'cos **on landing we will see not only the faces dear to us, but God comfort them, the bereaved ones, some who have lost their fellow;** their very soul mates and who perhaps on the edge of welcoming crowds or standing afar off watch dry-eyed the hand clasps of the friends, the passionate embraces of the younger sweethearts, the loving caress of the mother for her son..."

“...and I wonder what the thought of the motherless (war-made motherless), the widowed mother, the almost heartbroken sweetheart, the grey old man with stooping form bent with the weight of years or sorrow, may be – all these – how will it be with them as they wait eagerly scanning the faces for the sight of one familiar and from whom they can perhaps learn something of – of him. God help these noble women and brave men who pay the cost of war unmurmuring and to the crowded thoroughfares show only smiling faces.

“When I think of all this and much much more, I am pleased to know my homecoming will be quiet as there will be only a dozen or so to Launceston and then maybe we will land at night or early morning, and I wonder how many understand, fully understand, just for what we are paying this awful price...

“Everywhere I go I see changes, changes for the betterment of the whole world’s inhabitants, people from the uttermost ends of the earth are being brought together and each individual seems to gain something from his fellow creatures. Even the dirty greasy Arabs, untaught save by nature, and banded together living in an atmosphere of ill-health, taking gladly the crumbs from our table, yes even these can teach us something. Do these people understand better than we the meaning of those splendid words, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’...”

Francis’s service in France

In August 1915, whilst William was training in Egypt, Francis enlisted at Claremont, aged 27. His medical examination lists him as 5’7 ½”, with a fair complexion, blue eyes and a scar on his left knee. His number was 3289. Like William, he joined the 26th Battalion.

Below are some photos from the Stanley Discovery Museum archives, featuring enlisted soldiers who have not yet left. The first photo is reportedly from the Stanley Town Hall, and taken

in May 1915. The label gives the names of the soldiers as (back) C. Smith, W. Grubb, J. Holmes, and F.D. Fraser, and (front) G. Fraser, McBain, and W.E. Turner.

The label seems to name the man (who is quizzically holding the small fluffy dog) as William Grubb, who indeed did enlist in May 1915. However, based on other photographs and descriptions, it seems much more likely to be Francis, who did not enlist until August 1915.

Other men in the photo most likely include George Andrew Fraser (front left), his brother Frederick James Fraser (back right), and John James Holmes, the latter a Second Lieutenant of the Flying Corps. All of them hailed from Stanley, and enlisted in early August 1915. This makes it seem much more likely that the photo was taken between August and December, after they all enlisted but before they set off.

The second photo looks to be taken in a similar place as the first, possibly at the Anglican church in Stanley, based on the background. It does not have names attached, but includes the men from the first photo. Francis is probably the soldier on the far back left.

The third photo looks to be taken in a different spot altogether, with a two-crested mountain and a wide plain or desert in the background. It appears to feature mostly different men, except the "McBain" who appears in all three. Francis is back row, second from the far left.



The reinforcements for the 26th Battalion left Hobart on the HMAT *Ajana* on Dec 10th, 1915. Once reaching Cairo, Frank transferred to the 12th Battalion, on March 1st, 1916. Why he transferred is not recorded. The records of fellow Stanley soldiers George Fraser and Walter Gordon Stuart also state that they transferred to the 12th Battalion in Cairo, which doesn't seem like much of a coincidence at all.

They sailed to France, and disembarked in Marseilles on April 15th 1916. From then on, the battalion was engaged in trench warfare on the Western Front. Francis was in the Signaller Corps, most likely because he had much needed experience in telegraphy and Morse code from his postal worker days.

On June 2nd, he wrote a letter home regarding the death of his mate Walter Stuart two days earlier. Francis and Walter were both members of the Stanley Brass Band and Cricket Club, and both attended the local Anglican church. Walter's sister Isabel may have worked with Bill Grubb, for the business partnership Lean & Smith.

*"You have heard long before you receive this that poor Walter Stuart got knocked out. I thought I would scribble a few lines and let you know how it occurred. We have been supporting another Battalion in the firing line. We are just behind the trenches, and in the daytime are billeted in old houses. **We move up into the firing line every night, and rest here in the daytime.***

"I was in the telephone possie on May 31st, when our fellows came in after a heavy night's work. They were all knocked out completely, and Walter was telling me all about it. He had some lunch, as it was then about mid-day or after, and then laid down to snatch a few hours rest before going out again. About 3.30pm they started to shell our billet with high explosives and then rained shrapnel on to us. Walter had had a bit of sleep, and had relieved Geo Fraser, and at the entrance of billet was observing for enemy aeroplanes. He was standing under the archway when a shell burst right through the roof and smashed it in.

*“Poor Walter’s death was almost instantaneous. He never spoke but was dead before his wound was dressed. **I can tell you it was a blow to me, and I can’t tell you how sorry I am for his poor parents. Anyhow they may feel proud of their only son, as he died like a soldier at his post.** Geo Fraser was sleeping when the shelling started, and he got his wound somewhere in the leg. I don’t think it was anything serious, but he has gone away to the Hospital. I could not get a word with him, as I had to stick to the ‘phone.*

“We had a narrow escape. The first shell burst through the roof of the officers’ room, and we then disconnected our instrument and retired to an old cellar under the house, where we had emergency wires all ready. The very next shell that came went right through our ‘phone possie and knocked it to pieces.

*“All going well we will come out about middle of June for a few weeks’ rest, which we will all be glad of. **I am quite lost now.** Out of the eight who went to camp together (the “Happy Family”) I am the only one here now. The others are all scattered about. Fred Fraser is in the hospital with a bad knee. Stanley Wilkins is in this Battalion, and I often see him. Harry Trethewie, Ron Kay, Harry Carroll and Ralph Booth are all with us.*

*“It is 4am now and I am writing this in our possie while on duty, with the receiver strapped to my head listening for messages. I have to stop writing every now and then, so excuse any mistakes, and I am a bit sleepy on it. It is my birthday on the 27th, and we are going to celebrate it with a good old feast wherever we are. **Remember me to all the Stanley folk, and will see them all as soon as we settle this little argument. Do you think we can get home for next Christmas? I believe we will be there.**”*

Sadly, Francis did not make it home for next Christmas.

The letter he wrote was published in the Circular Head Chronicle on the 26th of July, 1916. However, Francis had been killed in action the previous day, during the infamous Battle of Pozieres, at age 28. We know little about his death from available sources.

We do know Frank was originally believed to be buried in Sunken Road Cemetery in Contalmaison. However, it was later decided he had been interred at the Pozieres British Cemetery, in which case he would be buried under the headstone of an unidentified soldier.

Of the 13-hundred unidentified soldiers buried in the cemetery, only 23 have special headstones, since they are believed to be buried there. Francis is one of them. His personal epitaph reads "For King and Country".

His father Archibald received Francis's inventory, which included a testament, poems, a notebook, a scarf and a letter. In relation to the effects, Archibald sent a letter in early June 1917 to Victoria Barracks, roughly saying:

"I have with forward ____ for the ____ package containing the effect of the late No.3289 Private F.R. Grubb, 12th Battalion. The effects, in themselves, though of little intrinsic value, are most precious in the eyes of a sorrowing father, who gratefully acknowledges the kindness and courtesy ____ at your hands. Illness prevented an acknowledgement at an earlier date.

Very gratefully yours, Archibald Grubb."



Figure 4: Francis's headstone



Figure 5: Francis in uniform

*“A wire was received by Mr. Jas. Grubb (James) on Friday (18 August) from Launceston, conveying the intelligence that his brother, Frank, had been killed in action in France on July 23rd. **The sad news cast quite a gloom over the township.** Signaller Frank Grubb enlisted in Stanley in July of last year, with several other boys from “The Nut.”*

*“They have been in action for some time, and it was only a month ago that the editor of this journal received a lengthy and interesting epistle from Frank, giving details of how poor Walter Stuart met his untimely end. This letter we published in full, and it was widely read. Now we have the mournful task of referring to the writer's end. He had indeed made the supreme sacrifice before his letter appeared in the Chronicle. The war is a grim reaper indeed, and **it is only recently that we have been wakened up to the fact that the dreadful struggle is still being waged ruthlessly and mercilessly...***

“He willingly went to fight for his King and Country, and died a noble death for a righteous cause. The residents extend their heartfelt sympathy to the aged father and sorrowing family.” – Circular Head Chronicle, 23 Aug 1916

“Quite a gloom was cast over our little town (writes our Stanley correspondent) when it became known that Signaller Frank Grubb had been killed in France. Deceased was one of a number of Stanley boys who left about twelve months ago; one of whom, Private Gordon Stuart was killed several months ago. Two out of the number now have made the supreme sacrifice for King and country...”

*“He was a native of Stanley, and a **general favourite and deepest sympathy is felt on all sides** for those who are left to mourn their sad loss but they will have the consolation of knowing that he did his duty, **well knowing the risks he was running in the hour of his country's need he voluntarily came forward to do his bit...**”* – North-Western Advocate, 21 Aug 1916

William's family and service in the Ypres Salient

Most likely before the news of Francis's death had reached home, William had reenlisted in the AIF. This time, he left with the 40th Battalion, the only all-Tasmanian battalion.

However, before he departed, William married Ethel Simmons, who is probably the “darling” he received a letter from in Gallipoli. They wedded on the 17th of October, 1916, at the Baptist Church in Hobart. Ethel's family was originally from Sydney, but she was born and raised in Launceston. Will and Ethel lived at 6 Welman St, Launceston (near where the Aquatic Centre is now) and she may have later moved to Crescent Road, Trevallyn.

Nine months later, on the 16th of July 1917, their daughter was born. She was named Joan Patricia Grubb.

Joan never got to meet her father.



Figure 6: Ethel and William Grubb

Due to his previous experience in the AIF, William joined as an officer (a 2nd Lieutenant). They disembarked from Adelaide on the 10th of February 1917, on the HMAT *Seang Bee*.

William resumed his diary-keeping whilst onboard. On the 17th April, he wrote of the death of Private William Free, who died of sickness off the coast of Sierra Leone, in west Africa.

*“At twelve noon, the remains of poor Free were lowered over the side, wrapped in the Australian flag and stretched along the seats of one of the ship’s boats. The Salute was given - all standing at attention – as the boat reached the water. The ropes shook loose from the hooks, and the boat, with its freight, drifted with the current towards the steam-launch , and was caught with a boat hook ...the steam-launch got under way... towing the ship boat **with the dead soldier resting along the seats and the live soldier sadly sitting steering** at the tiller. The sounds of the Last Post were sent across the water from the bugles.*

*I felt awfully sad. Nevertheless I rushed below, snatched up a camera I had borrowed, and as the boat was passing the bows of the big German steamer, took a snap through the porthole. I felt I wanted something to send to his people. **Quite a gloom was over the ship and I felt I had lost someone belonging to me.** I tried hard to be allowed to go ashore*

and follow the remains to the last resting place, but permission could not be given owing to the danger of infection.

*... I got permission... to make arrangements to have a tombstone erected to his memory over the grave, and to have a dozen photos taken of the monument and sent to his people home in Tasmania. **Our lads, God bless them, came forward and wanted to press larger sums on me, but knowing their state of funds I had to deny them this pleasure.***"

The *Seang Bee* arrived at the port of Devonport in the Plymouth sound on May 2nd. From there moved by train and foot to Durrington Camp, on the Salisbury Plain. The Plain is a chalk plateau in Wiltshire, nearly twice the size of Cape Barren Island, which is home to Stonehenge and the British Army's biggest training area. "*The Camp is large and at present has about 40,000 Australians quartered in its green huts...*"

After training, William left for the Western Front. On the way, they "*got aboard **motorbuses that once graced the streets of old London***", but had been repurposed as troop carriers. He joined the rest of the 40th Battalion, who were situated around the Belgian city of Ypres. They were in the middle of the Third Battle of Ypres, sometimes called the Battle of Passchendaele.

William's first major action in Europe was likely the Battle of Broodseinde Ridge, on the 4th of October, 1917. The Frank MacDonald Prize group walked the Battalion's journey during this battle, up to Tyne Cot Cemetery, where nearly twelve-thousand men are buried. It's likely that Will knew many of the men buried at Tyne Cot.

On the 3rd of November 1917, William was promoted from 2nd Lieutenant to Lieutenant. **He went on to lead a platoon**, which is usually about 20-50 soldiers.

By late November, the Fortieth were **living in dug outs running into Hill 60**. The large craters there had been created earlier in the year. According to Bill, “...*These dug outs are very long about 70 or 80 feet and are floored and fitted with electric light which is on all day till 11 p.m. We have rough wooden bedsteads and some old tables and boxes to sit on. We are very comfortable here and as safe as at home.*”

On the 28th November, William was in the middle of warning a sentry about something when two shells landed beside them. “*Only one exploded, the sentry had his rifle blown out of his hand and I got some mud over me. Thinking it had landed clear of the post I walked on, but after going 30 yards came back to make sure and was met by one of the men (Rose) who reported that men were buried. This proved too true and [until] 9pm we were all digging and working in this confined space getting at the men.*”

“*McKenna was the first out, his right arm was shattered, a hole in his chest and his knee crushed. The next was poor Tom Austin, who was dead, both his legs were smashed to pieces from ankle to hip. The last was Sergeant Lincey who spoke of a piece of iron that was crushing his leg. Four of us pulling together could only get him out 6 inches at a time. **He was dead when we got him**, his chest had a great hole in it and his fingers broken and legs crushed. I intended going out into No Man’s Land that night to trace some telephone wires I had found earlier and had cut but as all the men seemed a big shaken up on that post, I stopped...*”

Tom Austin and James Lincey are both buried in the Berks Cemetery Extension, near Ploegsteert, which the 2023 Frank MacDonald Prize group visited twice.

On Christmas Day, 1917, Bill awoke to a gum boot filled with a present from his servant Amer. Commissioned officers often had a 'servant', known as a 'batman', whom they chose themselves from among their men. Batmen and officers were often very close.

"Amer" was likely 2289 Private Herbert George Amer, of the 40th Battalion. Herbert was born in Hobart in 1895. In 1908, as reported in a local newspaper, he returned a lady's purse containing money after she left it in a Zeehan theatre. After surviving the war, he may have had a daughter in 1938 and then reenlisted with the AIF in WWII as a Corporal.

The Christmas lunch included "*boiled rabbits, ham and potatoes and plum pudding*", and for tea, they had "*salmon, fruit and custard, bread*". After tea, "*...each and every man declared himself full and satisfied at the finish and said the only thing that marred in anyway their Christmas was the absence of mail.*"

Bill also wrote that the "***guns have been particularly quiet today, I might almost say silent.***" With Amer and a 'Sergeant T', he built a big snowman, "*sitting on a barrow, just outside my door. Amer finished him off by placing a cigarette in his mouth...*"

On New Years Eve of 1917, William made another correct prediction: "*I thank God for the blessings of the past year and pray that the New Year may be brighter for many. **God grant it may bring peace.***"

In mid-January 1918, William was given leave to England. He would also "*try to get to Ireland and if possible, see a little of Scotland too*". His father Archibald was originally from Ireland, and at the time of his death still had a sister there, who William

presumably visited. William left France on the 24th Jan, and returned to the Ypres Salient in mid-Feb.

Once he returned, William found the war still raging. After a few days back, he wrote that *"'twas a beautiful moonlit night and would have been peaceful but for the Minnies..."*, Minnies being an Allied nickname for the German Minenwerfer shells.

The *"Minnies and pineapples"*, as he called them, were often deadly. The next day, William described how two men on patrol were hit by them. One was hit in the neck, but returned to base himself. The other, a Lance Corporal named Thomas Edwards, was *"badly hit in legs and middle. Sent for stretcher bearers. At the start there were five of us but presently I found myself alone sitting out in No Man's Land holding my hand over a dying man's mouth to keep his groans quiet. Shells were falling close. I don't remember any 15 minutes that ever seemed so long, while I waited for those stretcher bearers."*

"I came in for them myself and later went out and got the body of poor Edwards. He was [in the same reinforcements] and a fine chap." Edwards, who hailed from Ringarooma in north-east Tassie, was also buried at the Berks Cemetery Extension.

The deluge of explosives continued for weeks to come. According to William, *"...the trenches were trembling with vibration. I have never been under such shelling before and never want to again..."*

"When I remember what some returned soldiers have said about our boys, I feel terribly angry and hurt and wish I were there to defend their honour. I think if they were out in this sort of thing, they would develop broader views and get a truer knowledge of humanity... I have just been driven out of my dug out by a shell which landed almost on top and which if it had exploded would probably have ended this diary here."

“Men were darting from one part of the trenches to a less strafed one only to be forced back by Minnies etc. That night we lost one of the bravest men I have known, Sergeant E. Woolley D.C.M., who was killed in his dugout with Corporal Saddington MM, another fine chap...”

Both men were decorated soldiers, and buried at Berks. Woolley was from New Norfolk, and Saddington from Natone.



Figure 7: William in uniform

William's service in France

In the wider scheme of things, the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Bolsheviks meant that on the 3rd of March 1918, Russia pulled out of the war. This allowed the Germans to focus their power on the Western Front and they began their “Spring Offensive” in late March. This resulted in the Allied forces being moved around a lot. For the rest of the month, the 40th Battalion began to move south from Belgium to meet the attackers in France.

On the 10th of March, Bill wrote about an after-dinner walk he went on with Captain Ruddock of Hobart. *“The still evening air was lovely and the starry sky made me feel life was sweet. I*

thought of walks at home with you by my side and my heart ached a little...

Perhaps he wasn't writing a diary at all, but a series of letters for Ethel to read through, if something was to happen to him...

He would go on to mention a letter he received from a young C.H. McDougall, who had three brothers in the 40th Battalion. *"He asks me to write often and let him know how the boys are and myself. He is 13 years of age. Letters from the young folk never fail to please me..."*

The Battalion's War Diaries state that on the 19th of March, the Battalion had a Platoon Competition near Lumbres in France. Despite the heavy rain, the No.10 Platoon took the title, and took out third place in a brigade-wide competition a couple days later. It is likely that William led this Platoon.

Bill described the 24th of March as a *"beautiful sunny day and soldiers can be seen from my window – **walking about eating turnips** and some 'chatting by the wayside' (catching vermin from their shirts) and joking and betting on the results of the catch... Motor lorries are passing in great strings filled with Australian soldiers, while another battalion is marching. They don't know where they are going but think they overcarried a few miles last night.*

*"The motors stop for a while and the men get down and our boys gather round, some with trousers and hat on, others with flowing shirts, giving them the appearance of Chinese, all in search of information. Meanwhile little groups indulge in two-up, the battalion marches on. A little distance across the fields a group of men and brass instruments are lying on the grass probably **waiting for another lost battalion...**"*

This brightening in tone is temporary, as by the 26th, Bill states that, *“Australia seems to be the only safe place at present...”* The next day, *“...as we came along, we passed through shelled villages and met many homes being transported to a safer zone, some on carts, some on wheel trucks, pushed by women old in years and children of tender age, **struggling old women carrying babies in their arms lent particular pathos to moving scene.** Yesterday Fritz came through in armoured cars to within 2 km of here. Men of all regiments continue to arrive here. The transport section is all that is left of one Brigade...*

“This appears to be a repetition of 1914.”

*“**I think we will have to undergo severe fighting and hardship for some months** and then perhaps the back of his force will be broken and peace in sight.*

*I have just had a wash and shave under a hedge and **a kick of the football.** Fighting planes – some Australian – are rushing to and from the scene of action. One came very low on his return a few minutes ago and the observer waved a cheery good morning to us.”*

With the Germans seemingly making constant advancements, the front became a scene of traffic and urgency. *“The lorries were three thick in places, and battalions going up, and remnants of battalions coming back dodging in and out of the cars, and all the time **a sprinkling of the poor French people, fleeing** with their goods and chattels, on all sorts of conveyances, mostly wheelbarrows pushed by aged women. Once we passed a huge perambulator loaded with beds, mattresses etc., pushed by an old man while the old mother walked weeping by the side.”*

On the morning of the 27th of March, the Battalion arrived by train to Mondicourt. They marched south, and camped for the

night in paddocks near the village of Heilly. William “*got some straw from an old barn and some bundles of sticks and made a sort of bed*”, in which he and four of his mates slept. At midnight, he went to check the trenches of the nearby 37th Battalion. He “*...had a good look round and came back at 3am. Tracks of caterpillars very conspicuous where the guns were dragged out.*”

The next morning (28th of March), William wrote that, “*All the nice homes have been left here exactly as when occupied. Clocks going, etc. **Things seem fairly quiet at present here and if they remain so for a couple more days, we should have our artillery in position.***”

Unfortunately, things did not remain quiet for very long. According to the Unit War Diary, the Battalion were told to prepare “*...for the likelihood of an advance at short notice*”. At noon they received information that they were to attack at 1600 hours to the first objective. At 1900 hours, they would push on to the second objective.

William led No.10 Platoon, part of C Company. According to the War Diary, “*...although there was no Artillery support, the Battalion went forward under very heavy fire, which caused severe casualties, **the men behaving with the greatest coolness as if on a demonstration attack in peace time.***”

At around 1700 hours, William was hit in the shoulder by a machine gun bullet. He was bound up by a stretcher bearer, and instead of going to a dressing station, he “***pluckily insisted on remaining with the boys, and carrying on***”, in the words of Private J.R. Beams, from Beaconsfield. Private Beams went on to say Will was “*a very nice man*”.

There are several contradicting accounts given in the ‘Red Cross Society – Wounded and Missing’ files, but most

eyewitnesses state that at around 1800 hours, William was killed instantly by a bullet, through the forehead and out the back of his head.

After the fighting ended, William's body was taken to Battalion Headquarters, where it was later taken to and buried at Heilly Station Cemetery, near Mericourt. According to Captain Frank Green, he was "*...properly buried by the Battalion Padre. A few days afterwards, I had a substantial wooden Cross made, with his name, rank and unit inscribed, and had placed over the grave.*" Green would later mention Bill in his book 'The Fortieth', saying, that he was killed "*...**while leading his platoon with great skill and coolness***".

William's gravestone has the epitaph of "RESURGAM", a Latin word meaning "I SHALL RISE AGAIN". The stone also mistakenly states his age at death as 29, not 27.

His brother Francis lies only a twenty-minutes' drive away.

William's files contain an inventory of the effects he left in France after his death. In his trunks and cases, he left many interesting things, including two of his own pistols, silk shirts, three hairbrushes, numerous foreign souvenirs, maps and letters, books and a French dictionary, tobacco and a pipe, photos and negatives, bibles and prayer books, and religious charms and crosses. The last few things suggest that William was quite religious, and a keen photographer, both of which were also suggested by his writing.

"Deep regret was felt in Stanley when it became known that Lieut. W Grubb had been killed in action in France. This adds another to the list of Stanley natives who have given their all for King and country. The deceased was 27 years of age... and

leaves a widow and baby girl to mourn the loss of a gallant husband and father. **He was very popular with all who knew him, and deepest sympathy is felt for the many relatives in their loss. An elder brother, Frank, was killed in action last year.** – North-Western Advocate, 11 April 1918

“The sad intelligence was received in Launceston on Saturday by his wife of the death’ on active service in France, on 28th March, of Lieutenant Wm. E. K. Grubb. The deceased soldier was born in Stanley, and **spent most of his boyhood days in sight of the Nut...** The sympathy of everyone goes out to the young widow and baby girl, Joan, and to his many relatives, in their sad loss. His brother, Frank, also met his death in July, 1916, fighting for King and Country.” – Circular Head Chronicle, 10 April 1918

40th Battn.
A.I.F. GRUBB LT. W.E.K.

"Killed 28-3-18"

I saw him killed instantly by a bullet through the forehead and out through the back of his head, at 6 p.m. on March 28th, during our attack in front of Morlancourt. I was about 8 yds. from him. He had been wounded about an hour before, but pluckily insisted on remaining with the boys, and carrying on. His body was taken back and I saw it put on a limber with those of Ptes. A.J. Gale, who had been killed by shock, and G. Carruthers, killed outright by shell, and J. Wright, killed by bullet, who had all been killed the same evening, and were buried together, I believe in Heilly Cemetery. Lt. Grubb was the only Officer of the name in the Battn. He was dark, about 30 and 5'10". A very nice man.

Informant. Beams, Pte. J.R. R/4021
40th Battn. D. Coy. 14th Pltn.,
DARTFORD.

A.G. Campbell
London
15-7-18
H.G.

P.I.
G.S.M.



Figure 8 Excerpt from Red Cross Enquiry Files

Figure 9: William's gravestone at Heilly Station Cemetery

Prologue

The 40th Battalion suffered immense casualties during the three days of fighting at Morlancourt, which would be known as the

First Battle of Morlancourt. However, they made great advancements, and secured a vital position overlooking Amiens. Overall, the German offensive was successfully blunted, and later in the year, the Allies launched their own offensive. This would ultimately bring an end to a war.

Sadly, tragedy did not stop for the Grubb family after the armistice. Annie Jeffries and Catherine (Kate) Airey, sisters of Francis and William, later died in 1918 and 1922 respectively.

The Grubb family patriarch Archibald passed away on the 13th of January, 1923, after being bedridden for months. He would have been 88 years old next month. His funeral drew high attendance, and he was buried next to his wife in the Stanley Cemetery.

James George Grubb, known as Jim to the wider community, continued his barber shop for many years. He had five children with his wife Julia Shevenan; their names were Archibald, Mary Francis, Teresa and William. It is touching but tragic that Jim named his kids in honour of his deceased parents and brothers.

The second Francis, full name Francis William Grubb, was born in April 1917, a year after his namesake's death. He served in World War II in telecommunications, just like his uncle. He passed away in 1969 at age 52, leaving his wife alone with many children – several quite young – which sadly echoed his family two generations earlier. The second William was born in September 1919, also a year after his namesake's death.

Not much information can be found about William's daughter Joan in Tasmanian archives. However, an article in the Daily Telegraph of Sydney, in 1946, provides an explanation for this. It describes Joan Grubb, who was born and schooled in Launceston. At age 7, her hearing began to decline, and she attempted to hide it from her family. But by 14, it was apparent

that she was losing it quickly. Her mother took her to Sydney to specialists, but no cure was to be found. Within a year she was totally deaf. They moved up to Sydney (possibly with Ethel's parents), but Joan's disability made her struggle socially.

However, in June 1943, she began work at a lip-reading school as an assistant teacher. Three years later, she had overcome her shyness to the point she opened her own private school-for-the-deaf. Joan began to live a normal life; swimming, playing tennis, and going to the cinema. She lived on Salisbury Road, Rose Bay, in the eastern suburbs of Sydney.

A notice in the Sydney Morning Herald states that Joan passed away on the 11th of October, 2008, at the age of 91.

*“As well as teaching her pupils how to hear by watching the movement of the speaker’s lips, she also teaches them that **they need not be isolated from the rest of the world.**”* (Daily Telegraph, 8th Sept 1946)



Figure 10: Images of Joan Patricia Grubb in some Sydney newspapers and magazines

Commemoration

Both William and Francis's names are engraved on the Stanley War Memorial (Cenotaph), Stanley WWI Centenary Memorial,

and the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Additionally, William's name is on the War Memorial in Trevallyn.



Figure 11: William's name at the Trevallyn War Memorial



Figure 72: Stanley Cenotaph (left) and Centenary Memorial (right), with group mascot Frank Bear

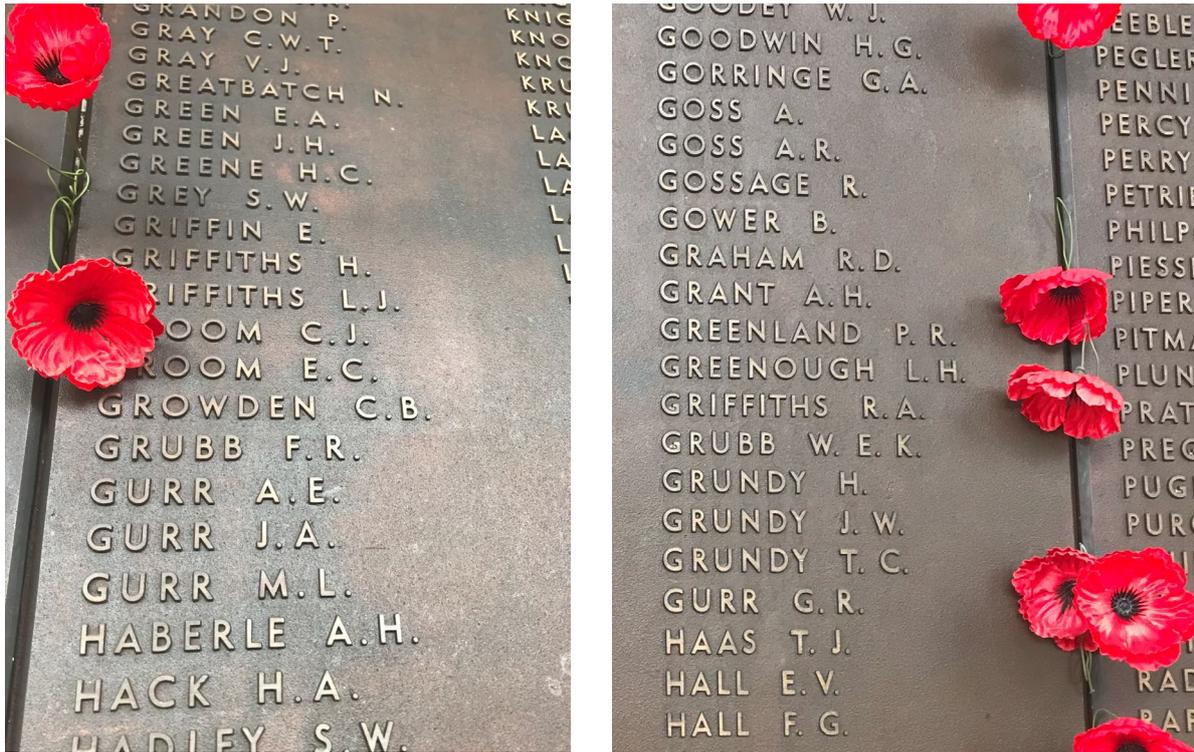


Figure 13: The names of the Grubb Brothers on the AWM Roll of Honour

References (books, websites, newspapers on Trove)

- Trove (trove.nla.gov.au), specifically archives of:
 - Circular Head Chronicle (Smithton)
 - The North-Western Advocate (Burnie)
 - The North-West Post (Formby/Devonport)
 - Daily Telegraph (Launceston)
 - The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) {*Joan's story and image*}
 - Sydney Mail (Sydney) {*image of Joan*}
 - Truth (Sydney) {*image of Joan*}
- Australian War Memorial, specifically for:
 - William's diary (had to be requested and digitised)
 - the 'Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau' files
 - AIF Unit War Diaries (40th Bn, March 1918)
- Stanley Discovery Museum

- Libraries Tasmania (Family History Archives)
- Virtual War Memorial Australia
- National Archives of Australia (Discovering Anzacs)
- *Along the Terrace*, Betty Jones, 2015 (book about owners and occupiers of Stanley from 1843-1922)
- *The Fortieth*, F.C. Green, 1922 (book about the 40th Bn)
- FindAGrave.com
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission website
- TasmanianWarCasualties.com

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Xander Power

Marist Regional College

August 2023

