



In Memory of

Trooper

FRANCES JAMES KEARSEY ROBERTSON

1688, 1st Australian Light Horse Machine Gun Squadron

who died age 22

on 9th January 1917

Son of Walter Thomas and Mona S. Robertson, of Indooroopilly, Queensland.

Remembered with honour

KANTARA WAR MEMORIAL CEMETERY, EGYPT



TROOPER
FRANCES JAMES KEARSEY ROBERTSON
 1ST AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE
 SERVICE NO: 1688



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03452.009

This inscription refers to **Francis James Kearsy (also Kersey) Robertson**, a young Brisbane man who was educated at the Toowoomba Grammar School from where he graduated in 1912. Francis was born in Brisbane, the son of Walter Thomas and Mona S. Robertson of Indooroopilly. He enlisted in Brisbane on 3 August 1915 and began training at Enoggera; a month later he was posted to the 2nd Light Horse Regiment reinforcements camped at Chermside, in those days somewhat beyond the urban sprawl of Brisbane.

Francis was 20 years and 9 months of age stating his occupation as stockman or station-hand. He was almost 5'9" tall and weighed 146 pounds. He had a fresh complexion, blue eyes and black hair, and wrote COE as his denomination. He sailed from Sydney on the A47 *Mashobra* on 4 October 1915. He had gained a couple of years' military experience in the civilian 8th Infantry in Brisbane. He arrived in Egypt as the Gallipoli expedition was coming to its disappointing conclusion. The 2nd Light Horse was refreshed and reinforced and moved east to the Suez Canal, the new front-line against the Turks.

In early 1916 the British were expecting a push towards Egypt from the Turks using the forces now freed from the defence of Gallipoli. It arrived in May. The light horse and British and New Zealand units strengthened Romani, about 25 kilometres east of the Canal as a defensive "line in the sand". Before the Battle of Romani (August 1916) the light horse actively patrolled and skirmished over a wide area of western Sinai. It is difficult to convey the sheer physical challenge of these operations. In temperatures that reached 50 degrees with rationed water and little shelter, men and horses suffered terribly. Sickness rates were high and Francis Robertson was evacuated to Egypt with septic sores in July. He missed the fighting at Romani. When he returned to the front he was transferred to the 1st Machine Gun Squadron. He remained in the 1st Brigade that included his old 2nd L.H. Regiment and was still under the overall command of General Harry Chauvel, another Toowoomba Grammar graduate (1882).

After their defeat at Romani the Turks moved east along the Mediterranean coast to a series of villages before the city of Gaza, the gateway to Palestine. In the latter months of 1916 the Allies pushed steadily east. After the capture of El Arish Francis' 1st Brigade joined in a raid against the town of Rafa on 8-9 January 1917. In a movement that took over twenty-four hours of riding and fighting the light horse succeeded in driving the Turks from Rafa. In the fighting the 1st Brigade lost 19 killed and 110 wounded. The machine gunners had 1 killed and 11 wounded; the fatality was Francis Robertson. Officially, he was killed in action on 9 January. His body was brought back to El Arish and buried there in a grave whose location gives us an insight into the difficulties of operating in Sinai: **Buried at 51 degrees from Lone Tree & 312 degrees from Telegraph Pole on north side of sunken road, El Arish.** After the war his remains were moved to the Kantara War Memorial Cemetery (F.372) on the eastern side of the Suez Canal. He was 22 years old when he died. His name on the Toowoomba Mothers' Memorial is incorrectly written as F.G. Robertson.

Francis' parents wrote to the historian in 1920 informing him that Francis was related on his mother's side to the Cannan brothers. T/Major Douglas H. Cannan was killed in the charge of the 15th Battalion at Gallipoli on

8 August 1915 and James H. Cannan was Lt Col. in command of the 15th Battalion at Gallipoli and in France. He later became the highly-decorated Brigadier-General commanding the 11th Brigade in 1917 and 1918, when it achieved success against the Germans in the Somme Valley offensive.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records state that he started school on 9th February 1909 and left on 16th December 1911. He was in the 1st XV Rugby in 1911. The School Magazine of May 1917 states, ' Francis J. Robertson, son of W. Robertson, of Indooroopilly,' at School 1909-1914. Was in the XV and athletic team. Enlisted 1915 and left as Corporal of the 11th Reinforcements of the 5th Light Horse. Killed at El-Arish, January, 1917. Age, 22 years.

External Links:

[CWGC](#)

[National Archives of Australia Military Records](#)

[National War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[AWM4 AIF unit war diaries 10/2/4 2ND ALH May 1915](#)



1st XV Rugby Team, Toowoomba Grammar School, 1911