

Brothers in arms: the Murphy story

Four brothers from Meremere went to fight in World War I, but only one returned, writes Blanton Smith.

The day Michael and Richard Murphy died in the battle for Chunuk Bair was the same one their brother John arrived on the Gallipoli peninsula.

"At least that's the story I've been told," Dan Murphy, a nephew of the brothers, says.

"He [John] arrived and went to find them and found out they'd both been killed. It must have been a horrible experience."

Michael, "Mick", was just 32-years-old and Richard, "Dick", was 23 when the pair died.

That was August 9, 1915, just one day after the darkest 24 hours for New Zealand soldiers fighting in Gallipoli.

On August 8, 1915, 425 New Zealanders lost their lives and the Wellington Battalion, of which the brothers were part of, was almost obliterated.

The battalion suffered 296 deaths on that day out of a total of 563 for the entire campaign.

Of the 14,000 soldiers who fought in Gallipoli, 2779 were killed and Mick and Dick were among them. They were also one of 55 pairs of brothers killed and one of the nine sets who died on the same day.

"It must have been horrible for the family," Dan says.

Of the nine Murphy boys four went to war, all were wounded and only one, John, "Jack", came home.

Jack went on to study at Oxford for a commission before returning to New Zealand and starting a family.

The fourth brother Patrick "Paddy" Murphy died of meningitis at the military hospital in Cannock Chase, England, on November 8, 1917. He was 28 years old.

"I've visited their graves, well the memorials, at Chunuk Bair and at Cannock Chase. It was emotional," Dan Murphy recounts.

"These people were my uncles. They were kids like I was on the farm and just happened to be born at the wrong time and happened to be cannon fodder.

"The family paid a high price." The Murphy family came to New Zealand from County Kerry in Ireland and settled on a dairy farm in Meremere, near Hawera.

Patrick and Ellen had 13 children, nine boys and four girls, one of whom died as a child.

Mick and Dick even took their horses from the farm to war, Dan says.

"They took them to Egypt but they never came home. They were shot over there."

Dan's father, Philip "Barney" Murphy, was the second youngest of the family and later took over the family farm.

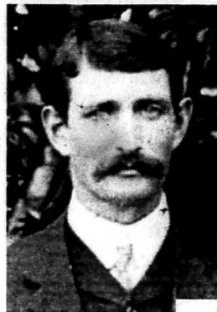
"I grew up on that farm and lived in the same house as those boys but I never met them."

"They died before I was born," he says.

Dan says his father didn't mention the war a lot so most of the information he collected over the years was found online.

Among the family memorabilia is a clipping from the *Hawera and Normanby Star*.

It is dated November 13, 1917



Michael "Mick" Murphy.
Below: Richard "Dick" Murphy.



Patrick "Paddy" Murphy died at the military hospital in Cannock Chase, England on November 8, 1917.



Patrick and Ellen Murphy, front, with their children

just days after Paddy's death. The article sums up the family's contribution to the war efforts but also the horrific effect the death of three sons had on the Meremere community.

"A deep gloom was cast over the district when news came through that Paddy Murphy had died in hospital in England," the clipping reads.

"He was a fine stamp of young New Zealand manhood as ever left our shores."

"This is the fourth son who has

gone to war, and two made the supreme sacrifice at Gallipoli.

"No family has a better record in New Zealand, for out of five brothers of military age four have gone to the front, and the fifth, after repeated attempts, including a surgical operation, has been finally turned down."

Two other Murphy brothers were conscripted and went to camp but never saw active service. Today, the Murphy boys' names are honoured on a memorial outside the Meremere School.



Richard "Dick" Murphy, left, and Michael "Mick" Murphy died at Chunuk Bair in Gallipoli on August 9, 1915. They were one of nine sets of brothers who died on the same day.