

## Uncle Jack

New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade

Wellington Mounted Rifles - Queen Alexandra's  
2nd (Wellington West Coast) Squadron

Egypt 1917-1919

World War 1



## MORGAN, John Ivo

43692 Trooper J. I. Morgan, New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade 28th Reinforcements, served in the Sinai and Palestine and saw action at the historic battle of Beersheba.



John Ivo (Jack) MORGAN was born on 15 February 1894 in Turakina, Wanganui. One of eight children<sup>1</sup> to parents William Edmund (Ted) and Charlotte Mary (Lotte) MORGAN, Jack received his early education at Mangamahu School.

After finishing school, a farmer at heart, Jack went straight to work on the family farm 'Mahuri' at Mangamahu. In 1910, when his parent's purchased 'Roseville' and had moved to Kaitoke, he and older brother Willie remained at 'Mahuri' and continued to farm there until 1914<sup>2</sup>.

Jack is my great-uncle and his parents, Ted and Lotte, are my great grandparents. Jack is older brother of my grandfather, Edgar Charles MORGAN.

## Enlistment

With his friend and neighbour Albert Armour NASH<sup>3</sup> in tow, Jack enlisted<sup>4 5</sup> for service on 8 January 1917 at Wanganui<sup>6</sup> aged 22 years.

He was declared fit for service and began his training at Trentham Camp where he was posted to New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade (NZMR) 28th Reinforcements with the rank of Trooper. Of slight build, Jack was 5 foot 10 inches with blue eyes, brown hair, and weighing 154lbs (70kg). Over the next few weeks Jack received intensive infantry training on basic drills including shooting, bayonet fighting, map reading, horsemanship etc, along with plenty of hard physical exercise.

Jack departed Wellington on 31 May 1917 (as part of a NZMR 249-strong reinforcement) aboard the steam ship *Westralia*<sup>7</sup> - destination Sydney, Australia. In Sydney he transhipped onto the Australian troopship *HMAT A17 Port Lincoln* along with reinforcements of the Australian 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Light Horse Regiments, departing Sydney on 11 June 1917. With stopovers in Melbourne and Freemantle, he endured an eight-week voyage before arriving at their final destination – Suez, Egypt on 6 August 1917.

## Egypt

Between April 1916 and October 1918, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles took part in the Sinai-Palestine Campaign, fighting against Ottoman forces through the Middle East.

While the Sinai-Palestine Campaign was a sideshow of the First World War compared to the titanic struggle on the Western Front, the collapse of Ottoman power in late 1918 was to have immense long-term consequences on the history of the region and the New Zealanders were to play a significant role in its eventual outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack had four sisters (Kathleen, Irene, Mary (Molly), and Euphemia (Effie)) and three brothers (William (Willie), Eric, and Edgar (Bob)). Eric died in 1903 when he was 9 years old.

<sup>2</sup> Ted and Lotte sold the 800-acre farm 'Mahuri' in 1915, after Willie enlisted. Jack was aged 21 years and had intentions to also go off to war.

<sup>3</sup> 43697 Trooper Albert Armour NASH embarked with Jack on *Westralia* on 31 May 1917, destination Sydney. Although Albert departed Sydney on the same day as Jack, he appears to have been on a different ship as he arrived in Egypt 9 weeks after Jack. Albert died from diphtheria on 1 November 1918 aged 21 years. He is buried at the Cairo War Memorial Cemetery, Ghoubra, Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to enlisting, Jack had served in the Territorials, the Queen Alexandra's 2nd (Wellington West Coast) Mounted Rifles. As far as possible, when enlisting, each regiment drew its recruits from four geographical regions (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Otago) until September 1917. From then on, men were sent overseas as generic mounted rifles reinforcements then were (generally) posted to their region's unit.

<sup>5</sup> Jack's older brother, William Coombes MORGAN, future brothers-in-law Herbert Hoey Burnett HUGHES (married Mary) and William Michael ROACHE (married Euphemia) also served - at Gallipoli, Egypt, and the Western Front (Europe).

<sup>6</sup> Jack had previously attempted to enlist six months earlier (June 1916) but was rejected on medical grounds (varicose veins).

<sup>7</sup> No HMNZT number was designated for this journey, possibly as it was transporting troops only as far as Sydney, Australia.

Jack arrived in Egypt and disembarked at Suez. He marched into Moascar Camp and was posted to NZMR Training Regiment and Base Depot - the training was hard; conducted in the surrounding desert as they would be fighting the Ottoman's on similar terrain. Training and rest camps were located away from the front line, and in their downtime the soldiers quickly developed an appreciation for sight-seeing and exploring archaeological or religious sites.

Less than a month was spent at Moascar before Jack was posted to his regiment, the Wellington Mounted Rifles - Queen Alexandra's 2nd (Wellington West Coast) Squadron on 3 September 1917. It is likely he joined his regiment at Marakeb where the NZMR had moved for a period of rest, the NZMR then moved to Fukhari<sup>8</sup> (Al-Fukhari) for a month of training on 18 September 1917.

## Beersheba

Late October 1917 saw the men in preparation for the Third Battle of Gaza [Beersheba<sup>9</sup>]. A series of night marches had them located at Asluj by the morning of 30 October 1917. Beersheba was defended by lines of trenches supported by isolated redoubts on earthworks and hills, which covered all approaches to the town. Tel el Saba is a large, fortified hill that overlooks the plain in front of Beersheba and needed to be taken before mounted troops could approach the town itself.

The job of capturing Tel el Saba was given to the New Zealand Mounted Rifles. It was defended by 300 Turks who were well prepared. The attack on Tel el Saba started at 9.10am. The Auckland and Canterbury Mounted Rifles are ordered to take the outpost atop the 300m high hill. The Wellington's are kept in reserve.

At 2 p.m. the WMR is ordered to send forward the 2nd (Wellington West Coast) Squadron to assist, and with bayonets fixed they charged up the hill on foot together with the Auckland's. After some fierce close quarters fighting these units had overrun the Ottoman positions and had captured the hill. The attack on Beersheba would not have been possible had it not been for the skill and bravery of the NZMR in capturing this hill.

Jack would have actively participated in the capture of Tel el Saba, and luckily, the casualties for the WMR in this battle were light. The WMR then moves across Palestine into the Jordan Valley as part of the Anzac Mounted Division and conduct raids into the highlands east of the Jordan.



[View looking from Beersheba across the desert plain to Tel el Saba.](#)

The armistice with the Ottoman Turks was signed on 30 October 1918<sup>10</sup> heralding the end of hostilities for Jack, though his return home to New Zealand would be delayed due to a shortage of troop transports at this time.

<sup>8</sup> Marakeb and Al-Fukhari are both located in the Gaza Strip.

<sup>9</sup> Modern day Beersheba (Be'er Sheva) is located in Israel and is the largest city in the Negev desert.

<sup>10</sup> The Armistice came into effect at midday 31 October 1918.

By now World War 1 was at an end and the men were itching to get home - it would take several months before Jack makes it back.

The beginning of 1919 saw the Regiment located at Rafah<sup>11</sup>, undergoing training and education to prepare the men for a return to civilian life. In order to break the monotony, a sports day and a day of riding competitions are held and no doubt other forms of entertainment, such as concerts, football and cricket matches, horse-racing and boxing contests were organised.

On 17 March 1919, the WMR leave Rafah by train to help quell a revolt in Egypt. There is anger at the lack of progress towards independence that has been promised after the war. Riots in the Nile Delta were suppressed after martial law was put into force. By May 1919, the WMR is bivouacked in Quwesna carrying out garrison duties and playing sport.

On 22 June 1919 the WMR travels by train from Quwesna to the Demobilisation Camp at Chevalier Island, Ismailia. The WMR is divided into two groups – one group to embark for home, the second to await transport to New Zealand in July. Jack was lucky, being in the first group, he embarked for New Zealand on *HMNZT 271 Ulimaroa*, departing Suez on 30 June 1919 and arriving in Auckland on 8 August 1919.

## After the War

**On his return from the war, Jack went back to farming and worked on his parent's farm 'Roseville' at Kaitoke.**

After having served a total of 2 years and 241 days (2 years and 63 days overseas), Jack was discharged from the army on 5 September 1919. For this service he was awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

It is while he is at Kaitoke he marries Hannah Bishop (Han) NASH in 1920. Hannah was older sister of Albert Armour NASH, whom Jack enlisted with back in 1917. They remained farming at Roseville until after the death of Jack's mother, Lotte in 1933. Jack and Han then moved to their farm 'Glen Cairn' in Bonny Glen (Marton) around 1934/1935, where they remained farming until their respective deaths.

Jack and Han had two children, Desmond Nash MORGAN (1924-1975) and Ngaire Nash MORGAN (1927-2019), both understood to have been born at Roseville<sup>12</sup>. Jack died on 10 July 1965 aged 71 years at home on his farm (Glen Cairn) at Marton and is buried at Aramoho Cemetery, Wanganui. Han died in 1972.

## References

Auckland War Memorial Museum – Online Cenotaph

<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C92691?srt=relevance&n=43692&from=%2Fwar-memorial%2Fonline-cenotaph%2Fsearch&ordinal=1>

Military Records – NZ Archives

[https://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE18535156](https://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE18535156)

Wellington Mounted Rifles - Timeline 1914-1919

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/wellington-mounted-rifles/1914>

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<sup>11</sup> Rafah today is located in the Gaza Strip and is the main border crossing between Egypt and Israel.

<sup>12</sup> New Zealand Electoral Rolls have Jack living at Roseville, Kaitoke as late as 1931.