

6/807 Corporal William Brass



William was born at How Cottage in Harray on 27th December 1888, the son of James Brass, a farm servant, and Isabella Brass (née Bews). Soon after the family moved to Aberdeenshire, where James worked as a cattleman near Stonehaven and another son, James, was born. The family had returned to Orkney, when William's mother, Isabella, died of tuberculosis at Crook, Rendall on 7th January 1893. William finished his schooling while living with his grandparents at Upper Ellibister in Rendall, then worked on their farm. William also joined the Orkney Royal Garrison Artillery (Territorial Volunteers), serving three years.

William left Orkney when aged 19, for the south island of New Zealand. He sailed from London on the liner *Ionic* on 9th December 1908, bound for Wellington.

William became a guide for parties climbing New Zealand's highest mountain, Mount Cook. It has three main peaks (highest 3,764 metres) and a vast network of glaciers that wrap the entire mountain in ice. It is subject to sudden storms that are sometimes long and severe. William demonstrated great strength and stamina on 22nd February 1914, when an avalanche overwhelmed a climber and two guides on Mount Cook. William found the body of guide Jock Richmond and then shared turns with others in carrying it on his back down the mountain in the dark.



Incredibly, when William first attempted to join up in Christchurch, he was turned down as "overweight" (weighed 154 pounds). However, he was successful when he tried again a few days later and enlisted in the Canterbury Regiment in Timaru on 17th August 1914.

William was appointed Lance Corporal on 25th August. He sailed on 11th October from New Zealand on Transport No. 11 *Athenic*, which called in at Aden before he landed in Egypt on 4th December. William was promoted again a month later, on 4th January 1915, to Corporal.

William landed at Anzac on Gallipoli with the Canterbury Battalion on 25th April. William Brass's Commonwealth War Graves record and his New Zealand Army service records both give the date of his death as between 25th April and 1st May 1915. He probably died during the desperate fighting to stop the Turkish counter-attacks on the first day, when troops of the Canterbury Battalion were thrown in at various parts of the line, including most of two companies in vain attempts to hold the lower slopes of Baby 700.



William's body was never found and identified on Gallipoli, so he is commemorated there, with other soldiers of the Canterbury Battalion, on Panel 74 on the Lone Pine Memorial. It commemorates more than 4,900 Australian and New Zealand servicemen who died in the Anzac area and whose graves are not known. William Brass is also commemorated on two of the Orkney war memorials: in Rendall but also in Kirkwall, as his father was living at Kelton, St Ola when William was killed.