Corporal Assal John O’Brien (XC 1903-11)

AWM ~ Roll of Honour
Assal John O’Brien

Service Number: 1425
Rank: Trooper
Unit: 6th Australian Light Horse Regiment
Date of death: 29 March 1918
Cause of death: Died of wounds
Age at death: 26
Place of death: Amman, Palestine
Place of association: Tumut, Australia
Occupation: Farmer
Marital Status: Married
Cemetery details: Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery, Damascus, Syria
Grave Reference: Row C, Grave No. 29

From “The Xaverian” 1917 p. 70

Tom and Assal O’Brien.—Tom spent a month at the School of Gunnery Instruction. Passed highly, and straightaway was made a Lance Corporal, and later on, was placed on the Instructional Staff in Egypt. Our informant said Assal was off to the same school, but, so far, we have heard no results. If abroad they do as they did at home, then they’ll both be—Captains, bold and brave. The School’s sincerest sympathy to them and theirs on the death of their brother, killed on active service in the battle of Messines.

From “The Xaverian” 1918 p. 54

Corporal Assal O’Brien.—Poor Assal died in Egypt, on 29th March, of wounds received while working a machine-gun. Father Bossonce, who attended him when dying, tells that Tommy and Assal were engaged at the same gun, and poor Assal, happening to raise his head for a moment over the parapet, received a stray bullet, which passed right through his head, causing his death after some hours. God rest the poor “little Captain’s” soul, and send comfort and consolation to the home at Tumut, robbed of yet another son; to poor “Tommy,” left to fight on alone; and, last, but not least, to the sorrowing wife and little child bereft of their best and dearest friend on earth.

From “The Xaverian” 1918 p. 80

Tuesday, April 9th.—Gloom cast over the School today as there were posted two telegrams telling of the deaths at the front of Assal O’Brien and Harold Quinlan. Both were of fairly recent

Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery dates from the First World War when Damascus was entered by Commonwealth forces on 1 October 1918. The first medical unit arriving the next day found the Turkish hospitals crowded with sick and wounded, and a few days later an epidemic of Influenza and cholera broke out. The First World War burials in this cemetery were mostly from these hospitals.
From “The Xaverian” 1915 p. 43

Tom O’Brien (1902-10), who led our cricket and football teams in such stirring times, who was Captain of the School and the hero and idol of the young boys, has gone to the war with his brother Assal. The troopship which took them down from New South Wales put in at Melbourne, but the troops were kept aboard. Hence we missed the pleasure of seeing again these doughty warriors of old. Last July, Tom wrote from his station at Gilmore to Father Boylan as follows: "A few lines to let you know that Assal and myself are going to join the colours. That will be two more for the old boys' list. We are giving up our farm, horses, cattle, sheep, in fact everything. We think it our duty to go, and I think more young fellows who have nothing much to do, ought to go to fight for their country. Remember me kindly to all my old friends at Xavier. I am sorry that I cannot get down to see you all before I go, but hope to come back some day."

From “The Xaverian” 1916 p. 60

Tom and Assal O’Brien, at the time of writing, were in Egypt, and had been in action together in a fight with the Turks near Katia. Tom writes from somewhere in the desert that he is feeling splendid. He spends most of the time in the saddle, the Light Horse, with the New Zealand Rifles, having been formed into what is called the Anzac Mounted Division. They are both in the machine-gun section, and did not expect to be able to get to France, as the Canal and Egypt required protection. Assal gives a short account of the fighting on August 4th. The Turks came on first at about one in the morning, but were held by the outposts till the main body got into position. They seemed very daring and confident, marching up battalion after battalion in good order, while our boys poured lead into them. Then came Assal's first experience of heavy fire as the Turkish guns sent in shrapnel on them while German aeroplanes tormented them with bombs. But he soon got used to it when he saw others round him shouting and taking no notice of anything but the advancing Turks. The Anzacs held their ground till the afternoon, when the officer in command ordered an advance. The British and New Zealanders had already moved up on the right, and the Australians closing in on them made them give themselves up in hundreds, driving what was left of them seven miles back to their entrenched position. The boys were pleased to meet again after the fight. Assal's fear had been for Tom, who was a horse holder during the action, and the shells seemed to be going in his direction. Assal has already hopes of his little son Pat making a good footballer, "as he may be of help to Xavier some day." Tom cannot have the same hope—the new arrival is a girl. Assal says that Clive Conrick had been attached to their regiment, but now holds a commission in the Camel Corps.