

The women who stayed behind while men died at Lone Pine

Ross McMullin

ON the 87th anniversary of the Battle of Lone Pine this week, a recently discovered letter underlines the profound impact of the Great War on Australians at home. Its author was Rose Taylor, whose brother, Fred Wright, was in the 7th Australian Battalion at Gallipoli. She sent the letter to that unit's famous commander, Colonel "Pompey" Elliott. Fred Wright was killed at Lone Pine while dealing with the deluge of Turkish bombs by catching them and throwing them back. This is the letter.

Dear Sir,

I beg that you will pardon the liberty that I am taking in writing to you, but I had a very dear brother under your command in the 7th Battalion, 1062 Corporal Fred Wright. I do not suppose for one moment that you remember him, but as I see by the newspaper a Cpl Wright 7th Battn mentioned in Sir Ian Hamilton's Despatch, I thought I would write and ask you if it was my bonny boy that had been honoured. He was killed on Lone Pine, 9th August.

If you could let me know any particulars of his death, I shall be so thankful. You will perhaps think it strange that I should ask you these things, but Fred so often mentioned

you when he wrote from Egypt and in one letter said "My Colonel is the whitest man I know. I would follow him anywhere, even to certain death. He is my ideal soldier, the best loved man in the battalion. God bless him".

So now you will understand why it is I write to you. Two of my brothers joined the AIF. One with the 7th, the other with the 15th Battalion. Both have paid the price of a widowed mother's sacrifice. One killed, the other missing since May. It is hard to bear, but it would be harder still to have had them stay at home when King and duty called.

I do not say we do not suffer, because we do. My mother is, as I said before, a widow, 61, and it is a severe blow to her. But oh, I am as proud of my mother as of my boys. She is as brave and true as they were.

For instance, she received the news of Fred's death, when the clergyman brought it, like this. She only faltered one moment - "My son! My son!" - then, drawing her hand over her eyes which were blinded with tears, said "Your mother will be as brave as you were, my son" just as though she was speaking to him, and quoted that beautiful passage of scripture that fits our fallen men so well: "Greater love

hath no man than this, that he giveth his life for his friends". I felt so small and mean at her side, and realised that she was a mother worthy of the soldier sons she had lost.

I do not know why I have told you all this, unless it is to let you know that while our boys are playing the game, the women they leave behind will all do the same. We honour and respect every one of them, and are so proud of all our bonny Australian boys and of the officers in command over them. They have all had a very rough time of it. I trust that before long the struggle will be over, we shall win the day and each one of us will be kinder to the other because of the anxiety and suffering we have had to share.

Yours very sincerely,

R.Taylor.

Elliott replied to Rose's letter with a detailed account of Fred and how he died.

Ross McMullin is author of the recently published book *Pompey Elliott*, which details Mrs Taylor's letter.