

# Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 13

## **JOHN FARRELL** **1883-1955**



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Corner Ann and Creek Streets  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
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## **Lieutenant Colonel John Farrell DSO**

John Farrell was born in Hamilton, Scotland on 20 March 1883, the son of Joseph Farrell and Mary (née McLaughlan). Joseph Farrell migrated to Australia in 1886 and his wife and three children joined him during the following year at Eidsvold in Queensland. John attended Eidsvold State School, completing his primary education and becoming a Pupil-teacher.

In 1901, the Farrell family moved to Howard where John taught first as a Pupil-teacher then from 1903 to 1911 as an Assistant Teacher. He also began his military service there, joining the Wide Bay Infantry Regiment as a Private. He was commissioned in 1905, promoted to Lieutenant in 1908 and Captain in 1910.

John Farrell was transferred to teach at Rockhampton Central Boys State School in 1911. He joined the Port Curtis Infantry Regiment as Quartermaster, then Company Commander and Adjutant. He married May Watson Williams, a teacher, at Rockhampton on 19 December 1912. In 1914, he acted as Head Teacher at Millchester, Charters Towers, taught at Leichhardt Ward State School and was appointed Head Teacher, Macknade State School in 1915.

In September 1915 John Farrell was released from the Department of Public Instruction for full-time military duties. He was a Company Commander at Brisbane Training Camp, then Quartermaster and Assistant Adjutant at Enoggera before his appointment as Captain in the Australian Imperial Force on 1 April 1916. He was promoted to the rank of Major in May and appointed second in command when the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was formed.

Major Farrell embarked from Sydney on *HMAT Borda* on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1916 and reached Armentières, France in November.



***HMAT A30 Borda***

*The HMAT A30 Borda weighed 11,136 tons with an average cruise speed of 14 knots or 25.92 kmph. It was owned by the P & O SN Co, London, and leased by the Commonwealth until 10 September 1917.*

In 1917 he fought at Ploegsteert Wood, the battle of Messines and at Warmeton and in October commanded the battalion in its successful attack at Zonnebeke. He again held high command from December to 12 January 1918 at Bois Grenier and Le Biset.

In February 1918 John Farrell was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and transferred to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion as Commanding Officer, a post he held until the end of the war. Under his leadership the 43<sup>rd</sup> distinguished itself in actions at Sully-le-Sec and Villers-Bretonneux, in the battle of Hamel in June, and in the August offensive at the capture of Méricourt-sur-Somme. On 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> September the battalion saw action near Mont St Quentin and captured Haut Allaines. Farrell was mentioned in despatches in December and awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership in the capture of Hamel.

John Farrell wrote about incidents of the life in France, each one with an interesting title such as *His Donk, Their All, La Petite Madame*.



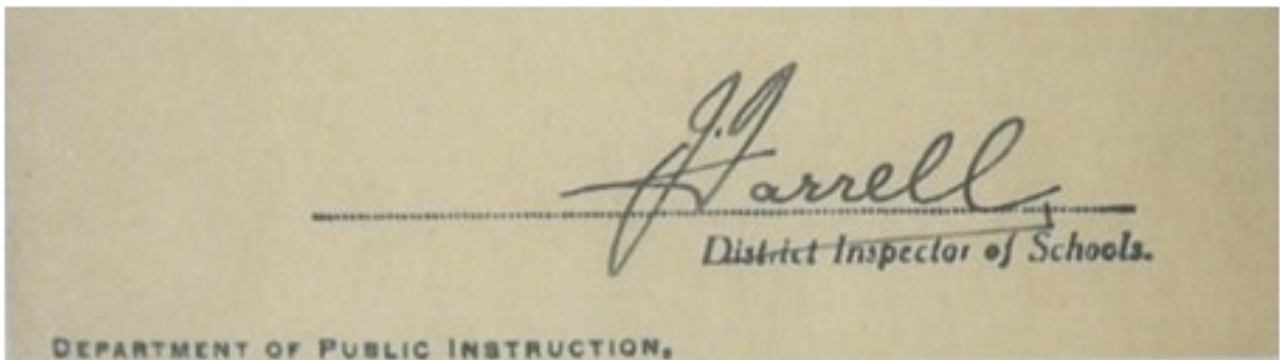
*Villers-Bretonneux was practically destroyed in 1918*

In *The Spirit of the Men*, Farrell's regard for the men he commanded is evident. He was a leader who took a strong personal interest in their welfare. He wrote, "Who will ever forget that first winter in Armentières when we were learning the game, those freezing nights on watch, those working parties at all hours in the darkness and in every state of weather? Just think of sleeping in your clothes, getting up at two am, a hurried breakfast by candle light, and then the trudge in gum-boots through the silent shell-wrecked streets and along the seemingly endless miles of duckboards to the line."

In August 1919 he returned to Australia and resumed teaching at Woolloowin State School, Brisbane. After transfer to Ascot as an Assistant Teacher he was promoted to Head Teacher at Woodford then Head Teacher at Barcaldine in 1921 – 23.

At this time the rolls at Saint Andrew's Church showed Mrs Farrell's name on the Roll of Communicants Living at a Distance while John Farrell was on the Adherents' Roll.

They were transferred to Mount Morgan in 1924. Mr J Farrell commenced duties as a District Inspector in 1926. He was based in Brisbane from 1934.



*Mr Farrell's signature appeared on many school reports and teacher appraisements in Queensland schools*

He retired in 1949, but in 1950-53 he was made Officer-in-Charge of special schools for recent migrants.

Survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter, he died on 9 December 1955 at Windsor, Brisbane.

## Select Bibliography

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*The Spirit of the Forty-Second* written by Vivian Brahms,

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Compiled by Noel Adsett, 2014



*Lest we forget*