



Stories from the Plaques

No.2: Two 'splendid brothers' and 'brave mates' James Mountain Simmonds and Edley Simmonds

The plaques in our Memorial Rose Garden often give an insight into the heartache, loss and pain that families must have experienced following the deaths of loved ones while in service.

There may not be a more poignant example of this than the plaque situated on the south wall for Private J.M Simmonds and Corporal E. Simmonds. The Simmonds brothers enlisted together, served together in the Middle East and New Guinea, and sadly died on the same day in November 1942 during a fierce battle at Gorari.


James Mountain ('Mount') and Edley ('Boy') Simmonds were brothers from a large farming family who lived at Pretoria in the small farming community of Warroo, some 33 kilometers west of Forbes in the central west of New South Wales.

Edley was the elder of the two, being born on 3 February 1913, while James was born on 7 October 1914 (making them 27 and 25 years old respectively on enlistment). They were the fourth and fifth sons among a very large clan - they had 11 living siblings, and were known as the 'middle boys' because of their position among their siblings.

The family remembers them as caring brothers, who would accompany their two younger sisters to social events.

They enlisted at Forbes on Monday 6 May 1940, and had the distinction of being allocated consecutive service numbers: James's was NX14281 and Edley's was NX14282. Their late sister (Marie) [stated](#) the boys were with a friend who wanted to get between them, but they wouldn't let him in order to get their respective numbers.

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AUSTRALIAN  MILITARY FORCES

A.A. Form A 200
54
BATHURST

ATTESTATION FORM

FOR SPECIAL FORCES RAISED FOR SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA OR ABROAD.

Army No. NX 14281

Surname SIMMONDS Other Names James Mountain
(BLOCK LETTERS)

Unit _____

Enlisted for service at Sydney (Place)
N. S. Wales (State) 6/1/40 (Date)

A
Questions to be put to persons called out or presenting themselves for voluntary enlistment.

1. What is your name? ... 1. Surname SIMMONDS
Other names James Mountain
2. Where were you born? ... 2. In or near the town of Sydney
in the state or country of N. S. Wales
3. Are you a natural born or a naturalised British Subject? ... 3. N. B. Yes
If the latter, papers are to be produced ...
4. What is your age and date of birth? ... 4. Age 28 yrs 9 mths.
Date of Birth 2/10/11
5. What is your trade or occupation? ... 5. Farm Hand
6. Are you married, single or widower? ... 6. Single
7. Give details of previous military service—
No. — Rank — Unit —
Other military service —
No. — Rank — Unit —
8. If now serving, give particulars—
No. — Rank — Unit —
9. Who is your actual next of kin? (Order of relationship—wife, eldest son, eldest daughter, father, mother, eldest brother, eldest sister, eldest half-brother, eldest half-sister)
Name Catherine May Simmonds
Address Victoria
10. What is your permanent address? ...
Relationship Mother
11. What is your religious denomination? (This question need not be answered if the man has a conscientious objection to doing so) ...
C of E

I, James Mountain Simmonds do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true and that I am willing to serve in the Australian Military Forces within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.


Witnessed by McKinnon Capt x J. Simmonds
(Signature of Attesting or Witnessing Officer) (Signature)

*The person will be warned that should he give false answers to any of these questions he will be liable to heavy penalties under the Defence Act.

National Archives of Australia NAA: B883, NX14281



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AUSTRALIAN  MILITARY FORCES

A.A. Form A 200
54
BATHURST

ATTESTATION FORM

FOR SPECIAL FORCES RAISED FOR SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA OR ABROAD.

Army No. NX 14282

Surname SIMMONDS Other Names ROLEY
(BLOCK LETTERS)

Unit _____

Enlisted for service at Sydney (Place)
N. S. Wales (State) 6/1/40 (Date)

A
Questions to be put to persons called out or presenting themselves for voluntary enlistment.

1. What is your name? ... 1. Surname SIMMONDS
Other names ROLEY Forbes
2. Where were you born? ... 2. In or near the town of N. S. Wales
3. Are you a natural born or a naturalised British Subject? ... 3. N. B. Yes
If the latter, papers are to be produced ...
4. What is your age and date of birth? ... 4. Age 27
Date of Birth 3/5/13
5. What is your trade or occupation? ... 5. Farm Hand
6. Are you married, single or widower? ... 6. Single
7. Give details of previous military service—
No. — Rank — Unit —
Other military service —
No. — Rank — Unit —
8. If now serving, give particulars—
No. — Rank — Unit —
9. Who is your actual next of kin? (Order of relationship—wife, eldest son, eldest daughter, father, mother, eldest brother, eldest sister, eldest half-brother, eldest half-sister)
Name Catherine May Simmonds
Address Victoria
10. What is your permanent address? ...
Relationship Mother
11. What is your religious denomination? (This question need not be answered if the man has a conscientious objection to doing so) ...
C of E

I, Edley Simmonds do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true and that I am willing to serve in the Australian Military Forces within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

Witnessed by McKinnon Capt x E. Simmonds
(Signature of Attesting or Witnessing Officer) (Signature)

*The person will be warned that should he give false answers to any of these questions he will be liable to heavy penalties under the Defence Act.

National Archives of Australia NAA: B883, NX14282



Enlistment papers and photos at the time of their enlistment for James Mountain Simmonds (NX14281) and Edley Simmonds (NX14282). (source: NAA)

The local newspaper, the Forbes Advocate, published a lengthy article in the 23 August 1940 edition with details of the 'popular brothers' and their farewell that had taken place a week before. A large crowd had assembled at their parents' property where they were honoured for their 'sterling and unselfish qualities' by family, friends and many ex-servicemen from the First AIF. Like so many others in rural areas, sport was a part of their upbringing, Their tennis and cricket prowess (they had 'played the game for the game's sake'), along with their strong work ethic was well known in the district.



'Boy' Simmonds (left), in uniform, taken early January 1941 and 'Mount' Simmonds (right) posing for a studio portrait taken August 1941. (source: Mrs Susanne Clarkson)

They served together throughout their time in the Army, first seeing action as part of the 7th Division's 25th Brigade, 2/31 Battalion D Company against Vichy French forces at Jezzine in Lebanon in June 1941.



The Simmonds brothers after the Syrian campaign, on the Syrian-Turkish border ('Mount' on the left, 'Boy' on the right) in between two mates. (source: Mrs Susanne Clarkson)

Returning to Australia in early 1942, the boys were able to return home on leave, before the unit trained in Queensland and then being sent to New Guinea, disembarking at Port Moresby on 9 September 1942 (around that time Edley was promoted to the rank of corporal).

A couple of months later the brothers were facing a determined and fierce rearguard fight against the retreating Japanese forces at Gorari, who had been ensnared in a pincer movement by the Australians. The fighting at Gorari was to be the last battle on the actual Track, before the Japanese were pushed back to the coastal beach heads.

On Tuesday 10 November, D Company of the 2/31st charged the entrenched enemy positions. A short distance from the Japanese, Mount was hit by a sniper, and fell to his knees. A mate pushed him to the ground (not knowing he was already killed), and Boy went to grab the Bren gun Mount had been holding. However, he too was hit by the same sniper and was killed instantly only a short distance from where Mount had been killed. In the brief but fierce battle, about a third of the company was [killed or wounded](#) including the two brothers.

When official news was received by the family back in Australia, family descendants tell of the shock of receiving two telegrams on the same day bearing the fateful news.

A front page article in the Forbes Advocate on 8 December 1942 tells of 'a wave of deep regret' when members of the local ex-service association drove to the property to inform the family, only to find the parents were absent, and the need to advise their siblings of the terrible news. Another article a few days later emphasised the pain that must have accompanied the news, stating 'a great deal of sorry still lingers in the district at the deaths of those two splendid brothers'.

TWO BROTHERS KILLED

In the Fighting in New
Guinea

Cpl. and Pte. Simmonds,
of Warroo, Forbes

A wave of deep regret passed over the Forbes, Bedgerabong and Warroo districts last Saturday when the news was circulated that Cpl. Edley and Pte. J. Mount ("Boy") Simmonds, sons of Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Simmonds, of "Pretoria," Warroo, had both been killed in action in the fighting in New Guinea on November 10.

When the news came to hand from the military authorities, Messrs. E. A. Clarence and K. H. Hastings, president and secretary respectively of the Forbes sub-branch of the Returned Soldiers' League, set about conveying it to the bereaved parents. They journeyed to "Pretoria" by car for the purpose, but on arrival there found that Mr. and Mrs. Simmonds were on a visit to relatives near Trundle, and their sad announcement had to be made to Mr. Albert Simmonds, a brother.

Sincere sympathy is extended to the members of the family.

Mr. Clarence also communicated the news to their sisters—Mesdames Percy Rout (Flint Street, Forbes), Tomlinson (Yarrabandai), and Cartwright (King's Plains, Blayney).

Three brothers of the deceased, Messrs. Albert, Thos. and Oliver Simmonds are in the V.D.C. at Forbes, and when the N.C.O.'s of that body met for class purposes on Saturday night the members, prior to the commencement of proceedings stood in silence for two minutes as a mark of respect to the memory of the two fallen soldiers.

Other brothers and sisters of the deceased are Messrs. Walter (A.I.F., somewhere in Australia), Robert (Warroo), Mrs. W. J. Magill (Trundle), and Miss Marie Simmonds (also of "Pretoria," Warroo).

The brothers enlisted at Forbes and were given following numbers—NX14281 Pte. J. M. Simmonds and NX14282 Cpl. E. Simmonds—in D. Co. of the 2nd/31st Bn. They served in the Middle East for something like 18 months, going right through the Syrian campaign together, and returned to Forbes about six months ago. Some three or four months ago they were sent with the Australian troops to New Guinea.

DOUBLE BEREAVEMENT

A great feeling of sorrow still lingers in the district at the deaths of those two splendid brothers, Cpl. Edley and Pte. James Simmonds, who paid the supreme sacrifice on the battlefields of New Guinea. Every person in the district shares this great loss with the bereaved family. In their passing they have left us an exemplary life to follow. In life these two lads were inseparable companions and in death they were not divided. Truly we may say in the words of Laurence Binyon:

"They went with songs to the battle,
they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady
and aglow,
They were staunch to the end against
odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.
They shall grow not old as we that are
left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the
years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in
the morning,
We will remember them."

SIMMONDS: In loving memory of
our brave and noble sons and
brothers, Cpl. Edley and Pte.
James M. Simmonds, killed in
action at Kokoda, New Guinea,
November 10, 1942.

"Resting where no shadows fall,
In perfect peace they await us all."

Inserted by their loving parents,
brothers and sisters.

Forbes Advocate articles: 'Two Brothers Killed' 8 December 1942 (p.1); 'Double Bereavement' 11 December 1942 (p.6); 'In memoriam' tribute 10 November 1950 (p.7).

For many years afterwards, the family placed 'In memoriam' tributes in the local newspaper on the anniversary of their deaths. However, while the family remembered their service (their 144 letters they wrote while on service, plus other mementos have been collated by a niece Mrs Susanne Clarkson and distributed to family members), the battle for Gorari was less known, and some feared it had been 'forgotten'.



Valued family portraits of the Simmonds brothers in uniform. (source: ABC News)



The late Marie Murray (youngest sister of the two brothers) and her daughter (Jenny Rose, their niece). Ms Rose was one of the brothers' descendants who traveled to Gorari in 2018. (source: ABC News)

In 2018, following the work of John Tannock (the son of a survivor from the Gorari battle), a [monument was unveiled](#) on Remembrance Day at the village of Gorari, bearing the names of those Australians killed there and nearby at Oivi.

Forbes is a long way from the tropical heat of Gorari (and the sheer hell of

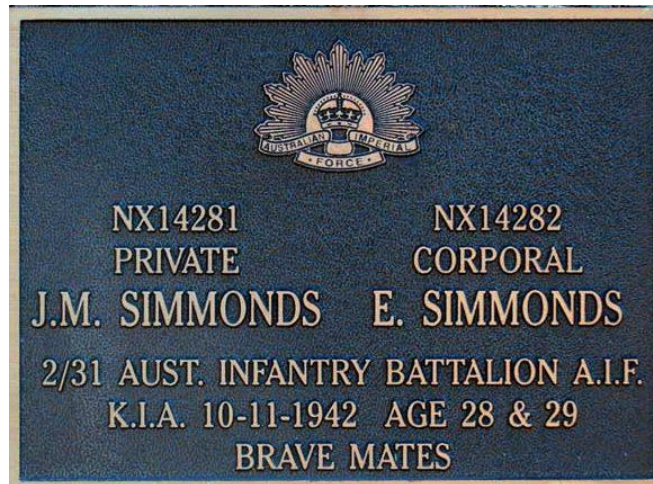
battle that would have been experienced there in November 1942), but during this trip to New Guinea, soil from the family property at Warroo was sprinkled on their respective graves in the Bomana War Cemetery by six descendants of the brothers. A small gesture, but a personal and touching one that will forever bridge the approximate 2,700km between the location where Boy and Mount lost their lives and their beloved farm and family.



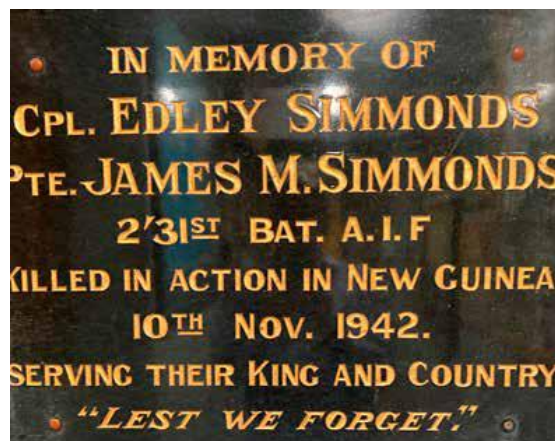
November 2018: a group photo of family descendants of some of the Australians killed at Gorari next to the monument. (source: ABC news)

The service of both Edley and James is commemorated in many locations, including:

- A plaque in the Walkway's Memorial Rose Garden (originally donated by the 2/31 Association of NSW) which can be viewed [online](#) or at the Garden (location South 60/1).
- On the Digital Honour Roll at the Walkway, where the names of all Australians killed during the Kokoda campaign are projected onto the window of the Education Centre.
- At the Forbes Services Memorial Club, where a special plaque originally laid in 1943 at their local church in Warroo is now located.
- At the Commonwealth War Graves Bomana War Cemetery (Port Moresby), where both graves are inscribed with 'Asleep in Jesus'.
- The Australian War Memorial's (AWM) Roll of Honour (plus their names are also due to be projected onto the exterior of the AWM's Hall of Memory in June, September and November 2023).
- The Forbes War Memorial.
- The Oivi/Gorari memorial at Gorari.



The plaque in the KTMW's Memorial Rose Garden for James Mountain and Edley Simmonds



The plaque in memory of the brothers that was originally laid at the Warroo Church in 1943. (source: Mrs Susanne Clarkson)

The story of the Simmonds' brothers is a touching reminder of the cost of warfare. Inseparable in life, they sadly died together far from their beloved family and farm.

But thanks to family members, and the descendants of others who fought on the Kokoda Track, their service has not been forgotten and is remembered with pride.

Lest We Forget.

Sources

Special thanks to Susanne Clarkson and John Tannock for their assistance with this article.

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