

Italy

489392 Lt. R. S. Duncan  
23 (N.Z.) Bn.,  
2 N.Z.E.F.,  
M.E.F.

6th Dec. '43.

Dear Mrs Bathgate,

As Johnny's Platoon Commander, I would like to write and send you my heartfelt sympathy in his death.

He was such a nice chap, liked by all of us for his cheerful, open and straight nature, and that he should die so soon and so young was very sad indeed, and cast a gloom over the whole platoon, and over the whole company. I had taken an especial liking to him, he always had a ready smile and a willing, intelligent and helpful manner.

You may have heard the details of his death and that two others died with him. In the course of duty, his section had to go forward of the crest of a hill we had occupied the night before and take up a new position. The section leader and his second in command, who both were later killed, were deciding where each man was to go, but before they were all settled, a machine gun opened fire on them from the right. When their attention was drawn in that direction, a German patrol of 30-40 men, heavily armed with tommy guns and automatics, sneaked up from the left and opened fire.

Johnny's section leader fired back with his Bren gun, but was almost instantly killed, whereupon John, with great courage and determination, lifted his M.C.O. from the gun and continued firing back.

This fighting spirit undoubtedly caused the Germans to withdraw, and saved the lives of the rest of the section. I hope that this will be some consolation to you and his father in your sad loss - that he died a man, clean, fighting and proven. It is also good that the end came at once, and that he did not suffer any pain.

Padre Holland came up at dusk and held a service over the three graves, and the section have taken a photograph, which you will doubtless receive later. His personal effects you will get later - the Padre has taken charge of them and will see they get sent through the proper safest channels.

With my deepest sympathy to you and all his family.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) R. S. DUNCAN, Lt.

13086 T/Major Angus Ross,  
23rd N.Z.Bn.,  
2 N.Z.E.F.  
3rd Dec. '43.

Dear Mr. Bathgate,

I very much regret having to write to you under such tragic circumstances. Please accept my very sincere sympathy in the loss of your son, John. I am sure all the officers and men of the Company to which John belonged join with me in expressing their regret and sorrow at his death.

On the morning of 28 Nov. after our successful capture of Point 208, just north of Sangro river, the Germans launched a clever counter-attack from one flank after successfully attracting the attention of our artillery, mortar and other observation posts by a sideshow from the opposite flank. John's section was a little forward of the others, examining some empty German trenches, and were taken by surprise. They fought back, but unfortunately John and two others were killed.

John Bathgate was one of the finest young men in the Company, and we grieve losing him. I know the news will be harder on you, but I am sure you will have none but proud memories of your son.

I trust the Great Healer will give healing to the wounds left by this sad news.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) ANGUS ROSS.