

Remembering the sacrifices of those with SC connections who served their country 100 years ago.

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Lance Corporal William James Richardson, No.4/1539

William James Richardson was born on 24 April 1884 at Green Island near Dunedin, the son of David and Caroline (née Borthwick) Richardson, who had come to New Zealand from Scotland in the mid 1870s. He started his schooling at Green Island, before the family moved south in 1893. William married Margaret McDonald on 27 July 1907 at Alexandra, and by 1910 the young family was living in Timaru. William and Margaret were to have five children - David Alexander Richardson, born 19 January 1908 at Alexandra; John Richardson, born 14 September 1910 at Timaru; William Thomas Richardson, born 7 June 1912 at Timaru; Leonard James Richardson, born 2 August 1913 at Timaru; and Margaret Mary Richardson, born 23 August 1914 at Timaru. These children attended Sacred Heart School in Timaru, and Margaret for a year at Timaru Main.

William worked as a dredgeman at Alexandra. When he enlisted on 9 October 1915, he was a miner working for a company at Waiuta, Greymouth, where he had probably gone for work. He named as his next-of-kin his mother – Mrs C. Richardson, c/o D. Richardson, Queens Hotel, Timaru. D. Richardson was his brother David who lived in Timaru for some years until his death in 1921. Their father David died in 1900. William's wife, Mrs M. Richardson, of 140 North Street, Timaru, was also nominated.

Sapper William James Richardson embarked on the Ruapehu from Auckland on 18 December 1915, attached to Headquarters of the Tunnelling Company (as fitting his occupation) and destined for Plymouth, England. He was a well-built man, standing at 5 feet 9 inches and weighing 161 pounds, "fit for field force". On 1 June 1916 he was appointed lance-corporal and on 13 June assigned to carry out police and security duties. After just three weeks he was on his way to France.

After being admitted to the company hospital in France on 25 September he was able to rejoin his unit on 5 October 1916. On 27 October 1916 in

France, 4/1539 Lance Corporal W. J. Richardson, of the New Zealand Engineers Tunnelling Corps, was awarded the Military Medal “for acts of gallantry in the field”. (London Gazette, 27 October 1916) On 8 February 1917 William was seriously wounded, evacuated and admitted to 37th Field Ambulance. The name of William James Richardson appeared in Casualty List No. 516 – he had died of his wounds on 9 February 1917, in the ambulance in the field. He was buried in Habarcq Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas-de-Calais, France, one of just two New Zealanders buried here before the cemetery extension was closed in March 1917.

On 29 October 1915 his wife, Margaret, had applied for the shilling per day separation allowance granted to the wives of members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Less than 16 months later she was a widow with five young children. William inserted his eldest son's name - Master D. Richardson, of 140 North Street, Timaru, into a short form of will, dated 29 August 1916, but there are no other details and no signature or witness thereof. His medals, including the Military Medal, British War Medal and Victory Medal, plaque and scroll were sent to his widow at 140 North Street, Timaru.

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