

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 21 July 2018

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Private Walter COLLINS, No.40894

The second son of William and Amelia (née Patterson) Collins, late of Cromwell, Otago, Walter Collins was born on 1 June 1877 at Lake Wanaka, Central Otago. From the mid 1870s the family resided at Pembroke (Wanaka) and at Albert Town on the Clutha River, where his father was a puntman. In February 1882 the cottage occupied by the wife and children of Mr W. Collins was destroyed by fire. Nothing was saved, and a public subscription was raised to support Mr Collins and his family, he being described as “well known in the locality as a sober industrious man”. This was not the only tragedy to hit this family – daughter Anna died at just three months (1888); daughter Amelia (Sissy) died in childbirth in 1903; and the eldest son William, who had married in 1902, died in 1909, leaving a widow and three little children. Mrs Amelia Collins died in 1908, aged 65, and English-born Mr William Collins in 1909, aged 74. Along with his siblings, Walter attended the Albert Town School, and Pembroke School at Wanaka. On 17 April 1913 in the Trinity Presbyterian Parish of Timaru he married Mary Jane Shaw. He had come to the Timaru area about 1911. Thereafter Walter and Mary Jane lived in Timaru.

Walter had not previously registered for compulsory military training as he was over age. He was living in Timaru prior to enlistment and working as a farm labourer at Fenwick's Station, Maraeweka. W. Collins, Maraeweka, gave 2s.6d. to the North Otago Red Cross Society for the British Red Cross Fund in October 1916. He enlisted on 2 October 1916 at Oamaru. W. Collins, Maraeweka, was a member of the North Otago quota of the 23rd Reinforcements who were given a farewell luncheon by the Waitaki County Council at the North Otago Agricultural and Pastoral Show Grounds on 16 November 1916, prior to their departure for the Front.

At enlistment Walter was 39 years old and Presbyterian. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed over 11 stone. His teeth were only fair, and he had suffered from rheumatic fever. Otherwise he was fit for service.

Walter Collins saw very little time at the front before his death. He had embarked on the Ruapehu on 14 March 1917 with the 23rd Reinforcements; he marched into Sling Camp on 21 May and overseas on 21 June; on 9 July 1917 he joined his battalion, only to be killed in the field in Belgium on 1 October 1917 while serving with the Otago Infantry. The Battle of Polygon Wood took place from 26 September till 3 October 1917, one of the Ypres offensives in Belgium. Collins was one of the 206 men named in the 694th casualty list as killed in action.

Private Walter Collins, 40894, was buried first in the Central Shell Hole in the front line, kept by the Anzac Corps, and afterwards laid to rest in the Tyne Cot Cemetery, at Zonnebeke, Belgium.

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