

GREAT WAR STORIES

Rifleman Cecil James Averis

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

CAROLE SMITH

Cecil James Averis was born November 1, 1890 at Kingsdown; the eighth child of Daniel & Emma Averis.

Cecil attended Kingsdown School along with his siblings and in 1896 with his brother Frank was in Mr Stewart's room. Cecil became a joiner and cabinet-maker like his older brother Albert.

He served his apprenticeship at Tooth's of Timaru before being employed by John Menzies of Waimate as a carpenter.

In 1916 conscription for military service was introduced to help keep New Zealand's supply of reinforcements during World War One.

Cecil's name was drawn in the first military service ballot for No. 10 (South Canterbury) recruiting district in November 1916 and he enlisted on January 25, 1917 at the age of 26. His height was given as 5ft 5ins, weight 136lb with grey eyes and brown hair. His religion is listed as Anglican. Cecil was living at 5 Parsonage Road, Waimate.

He left for Trentham on the February 13, 1917.

It would appear Cecil was given leave before heading for overseas duty as an article in *The Timaru Herald* on April 9, 1917, under "Soldiers Farewelled", tells us that Pvts C Averis and F Burness were farewelled in the Kingsdown school by a number of their friends and well wishes. Mr Craigie addressed the meeting and made presentations to the two soldiers: a Kodak to Private Averis and a wristlet watch to Private Burness.

Cecil left for overseas duty on April 26, 1917 on board the ship *Turakina*, with the 25th Reinforcements. The ship arrived in Plymouth, England on July 20, 1917 and the troops marched into Sling Camp, Wiltshire to become part of the NZ Infantry Reserve Brigade.

Cecil was posted to 3 Battalion, NZRB and his rank was changed to Rifleman. During his time at Sling Camp he was often able to meet his cousin William Merry and occasionally they had leave



Cecil Averis (right) and his cousin Bill Merry.

PHOTO COURTESY C SMITH

together where Cecil would visit William's parents in Westbury, Buckinghamshire.

The NZRB left for France on September 5 and on September 17 Cecil was posted to the field. On July 22, 1918 Cecil lost a day's pay for being improperly dressed on Parade.

After the Armistice Cecil was amongst the allies who were billeted in Cologne. He embarked on the troop ship *Carpentaria* from Liverpool on April 2, 1919. Cecil's father Daniel died on May 16, 1919 and Cecil was given special leave to attend his father's funeral, and was finally discharged from the army the following month.

Cecil returned to live in Waimate. The address he gave on discharge was 29 Parsonage Rd.

While he was away he had been writing to Edith McLauchlan daughter of James and Elizabeth McLauchlan. She was living with her older brother Andrew who had a business in Waimate. On December 13, 1922 Cecil and Edith were married in Christchurch.

After the wedding the couple returned to Waimate to start their married life. Cecil built their first home in Belt St and it is in Waimate that their two sons, Dereck and Ian, were born. Cecil

belonged to the Manchester Unity Friendly Society. A framed certificate for Cecil J Averis, Grandmaster, dated January 3, 1923 was later donated to the Waimate Museum by the family.

With the onset of the Depression work was hard to come by and the family made the decision to move to Rangiora, north of Christchurch at the end of 1931.

The family lived in a number of rented houses. Cecil took an active part in the St John Ambulance Brigade when it was reformed in Rangiora in the 1930s. He could often be found at the local rugby grounds and then every Easter until 1939 at the NZ Motorcycle Grand Prix at Cust.

With the onset of World War Two builders were in much demand and the company Keir and Thompson Ltd had started building prefabricated army huts. Cecil assisted with extensions at Burnham Camp and the Air Force Camps at Woodburne, Blenheim.

It was then on to the North Island where he was building storage facilities for the military at Mangaroa near Upper Hutt. As the war drew to a close the State Housing building programme commenced in the Hutt Valley and this kept Cecil and many other builders very busy. At this stage Cecil was employed by George Bennett.

Cecil purchased a section in Whakatiki St, Upper Hutt and built his own house. While the house was being built Edith packed up in Rangiora and rented rooms in Petone until the house was finished. After Cecil retired he worked for TVL (Tasman Vaccine Laboratories Ltd) which was across the road in Whakatiki Street.

Cecil and Edith continued to live in Upper Hutt until they died. Cecil died on August 29, 1972 at Lower Hutt Hospital and Edith on September 27, 1980 at Calvary Hospital, Wellington. Their ashes are in the RSA section at Akatarawa Cemetery, Upper Hutt.

This story is part of the SCROLL project. You can find SCROLL stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll

GREAT WAR STORIES

Sergeant James Gilbert Morrison

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

CAROL BELL

James Morrison was a labourer for Polson & Carradus of Windsor (inland from Oamaru) when he enlisted as a private with the Otago Infantry Battalion on August 21, 1914.

His next of kin were James and Sarah Morrison of 11 Clyde St in Timaru, and his religion was given as Presbyterian.

His parents' address has also been noted as Waikouaiti.

Morrison embarked for Suez with the Main Body at Port Chalmers on October 16, 1914 on the troopship Ruapehu or Hawkes Bay and was part of the single largest group of New Zealanders ever to leave the country as Britain accepted New Zealand's offer of an expeditionary force of about 8000 men.

Recruiting had begun on August 8 so the response, so early in the conflict, was overwhelming as thousands of young men rushed to volunteer.

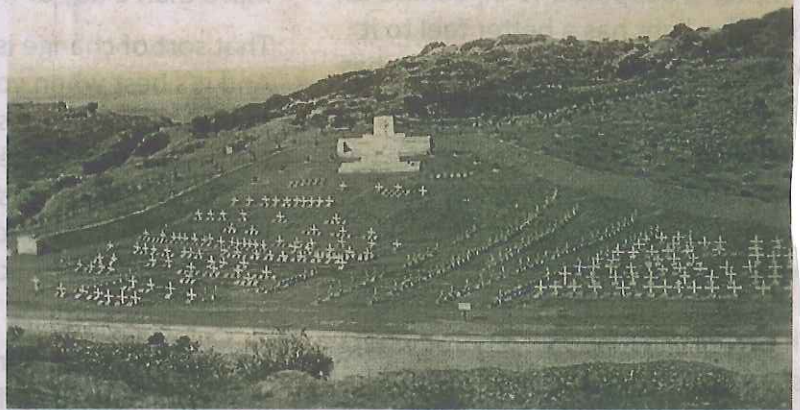
They were transported in 10 troopships, which the government had requisitioned from commercial shipping lines.

Before they were loaded with men, horses, ammunition, equipment and supplies the ships were hurriedly repainted a uniform Admiralty grey – one ship was completely repainted in less than four days.

Morrison's war was short.

He was promoted to sergeant in the Dardanelles on May 6, 1915 and killed in action on July 13, 1915, aged 29.

SHRAPNEL VALLEY CEMETERY.



He was buried in the Shrapnel Valley Cemetery on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Timaru Herald of August 8, 1915 noted: *Death of Timaru Man* – Mrs S. Morrison of Timaru has received the following telegram from the Minister of Defence (the Hon. James Allen): 'Regret to advise you cable received this day reports that your son, 8-759 Sergeant James Gilbert Morrison was killed in action July 13, 1915. Please accept my sincerest sympathy in the loss which you and New Zealand has suffered'. Sergt Morrison was well known in Timaru, where he was employed for eight years in Mr P.G. Allen's seed shop. He took a prominent part in local sports. His father is caretaker of Chalmers Church.

Shrapnel Valley Cemetery on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



SERGEANT J. G. MORRISON,
Otago Infantry Battalion,
Killed in action.

■ This is part of the SCroll project. You can find SCroll stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll