

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 15 April 2017

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Rifleman John Thompson Connelly No.49874

John Connelly was born at Dunedin on 25 August 1883, the youngest son of four boys and three girls born to William Henry (1836- 1916) and Susannah nee Thompson (1840- 1916) Connelly. Both parents were born in Ireland and had emigrated to New Zealand in the 1870s. John had been employed as a mill hand for Ross Glendinning & Company, Dunedin, and was living at Peel Forest, Geraldine, when he enlisted at Timaru on 3 February 1917. His enlistment papers described him as being aged 33 years, single, Presbyterian, 5 foot 6 inches tall, weighing 148 lbs, chest measuring 35 – 37 ½ inches, of dark complexion, grey eyes, black hair and having a scar above his right knee, a small tumour inside his left thigh and slight varicose veins. He also stated that he had had nine years service with the Dunedin Volunteers and nominated his sister, Mrs Mary Stewart of 40a Bayview Road, South Dunedin, as his next of kin. This was later changed to his brother, Mr William Connelly of 21 Elizabeth Street, Timaru.

Posted to the NZ Rifle Brigade, J Company, he left from Wellington on 12 June 1917 with the 26th Reinforcements aboard the Maunganui bound for Plymouth, Devon, England, arriving 16 August. Further training followed at Tidworth Camp on Salisbury Plains and at Brocton, Staffordshire, before leaving for France on 23 October. On 2 November 1917 he was posted to D Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd NZ Rifle Brigade and on 25 November, was detached to No.2 Field Company NZ Engineers. Here he was involved in helping construct huts and stables for horses, repairing road, building protective walls against enemy bombs and various other tasks in preparation for the spring offensive. He returned to his unit on 23 February 1918. On 19 April 1918, whilst in action in the Hebuterne area, he received serious gunshot wounds to his neck and left arm which resulted in him being paralysed. He was admitted to No1 NZ Field Ambulance and then transferred to No 3 Casualty Clearance Station and on 21 April, was admitted to No 9 General Hospital at Rouen. On 23 April he was put on a hospital ship for England and admitted on the 24th to No.1 NZ General Hospital at Brockenhurst. He died of his wounds on 26 April and was buried on 29 April in the Brockenhurst (St Nicholas) Churchyard, Hampshire, England, in Plot A, Row 3, Grave Number 16. For his service, John was awarded the British War and Victory Medals which were forwarded after the war, along with a scroll and plaque, to his brother William. John's name is included on his parent's headstone in the Anderson's Bay Cemetery, Dunedin, Block 44, Plot 21.

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