

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

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### Rifleman Richard Frank Wills, No.25/368

Richard Wills was born at Northampton, England, on 16 December 1876, son of William (1844-1917) and Susan Mary (1848-1880 nee King) Wills. His parents emigrated to New Zealand in the late 1870s. William was in business at Waimate as a shoemaker and died in Christchurch on 2 February 1917. Mrs Wills died at Waimate on 21 March 1880, and is buried in the cemetery there.

Richard had previously served in the Boer War as a groom. 9456 Private R.F. Wills had left with G Sqn, 10<sup>th</sup> Contingent, for South Africa aboard SS Norfolk on 19 April 1902. When he enlisted for WW1 service on 11 October 1915, he was working for Mr H.L. Lock at Methven. Posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion NZ Rifle Brigade, C Company, he was described as weighing 140 pounds, chest measuring 33 – 36 inches, of fresh complexion, blue eyes, light brown hair, his teeth requiring attention and having a scar on his chin. He was single, C of E religion but no height was listed on his papers. He nominated his father William, who was at this time living at 192 Antigua Street, Christchurch, as his next of kin and his current address.

Rifleman Wills left Wellington on the SS Ulimaroa for Suez, Egypt, on 8 January 1916, and very quickly departed on 7 April for France, on SS Alaunia. Shortly after arrival in France he was taken ill with diarrhoea, and was admitted to the NZ Field Ambulance from 19 April to 22 April. At this time his unit was fighting in the Somme area, and on 31 May 1916, he was killed when a high explosive shell exploded, burying him in his dugout.

When Richard Wills enlisted, he was working with his nephew Edward Sole, who was born at Waimate on 3 June 1895, son of his sister Emma (1870-1939). Emma had married William Henry Sole (1867-1941) in Timaru in 1890. Both had enlisted the same day, Edward being given the regimental number of 25/359, and they were to serve together from then on. Both were killed in the same dugout on the same day, and their names are commemorated on Richard's father William's headstone in the Linwood (Christchurch) cemetery – Block 46, Plot 79. Rifleman Wills was buried in the Cite Bon Jean Military Cemetery, Armentieres, France, grave reference 1.B.12 and his nephew, Rifleman Edward Sole, is buried in grave reference 1.B.10.

After the war Richard's war medals, the British War Medal and Victory Medal, along with a plaque and scroll, were sent to his brother, William Henry Wills (1879-1947) who was a blacksmith at Albury. William Henry was also later buried in the same plot in the Linwood Cemetery as his father, William Snr. Both Richard and Edward are commemorated on the Timaru and Waimate cenotaphs.

*This is part of the SCRoll project. You can find SCRoll stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at [museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll](http://museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll)*