

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

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Private William John GRIFFITHS No.12/1084

William John Griffiths, familiarly known as Sandy, was born on 17 December 1885 in Timaru, one of the family of six of Walter John and Agnes (née Andrews) Griffiths. Sandy was educated at Timaru South School (Side School) and Timaru Main School, as the family lived at various addresses in the south end of Timaru, before going out to work in May 1898. In the early years his father worked as a butcher in the Timaru area, applying for a licence to slaughter at Kingsdown in 1886 and spending some time at Fairlie around 1896.

Some time after 1905 the family moved to Auckland. There, before the war, William worked as a painter. He married Maud Catherine Badley in 1908, and it was in Auckland that he enlisted on 7 September 1914, aged 29 years, a married man with two young children (Mavis Royal born in 1911 and Victor Trevor born in 1913).

William Griffiths was for many years a bandsman in the Auckland City Corps of the Salvation Army. He was also a member of the 1st Battalion, Auckland Regiment, NZEF Band, and would have left Auckland on 24 September 1914 with the band on the Waimana. As the transport headed north they were sent an urgent message to return to Auckland for fear of the threat posed by German warships in the Pacific Ocean. Consequently they joined the rest of the Main Body in Wellington and on 16 October 1914 William was on his way to Egypt with the Auckland Infantry Battalion.

At Gallipoli William transferred to the ranks of the combatants and served as a stretcher bearer. Ten months after his embarkation, on 8 August 1915, he was wounded and admitted to the hospital ship Sicilia. From there he was transferred to Alexandria and admitted to the 19th General Hospital on 12 August. William died on 18 August 1915 at Alexandria, of gunshot wounds to the head and thigh and fracture of the skull which he had received at Gallipoli. He left his wife and two young children. Private W. J. (Sandy) Griffiths is buried in the Alexandria (Chatby) Military and War Memorial Cemetery in Egypt, and his name is inscribed on the Timaru War Memorial Wall.

In 1916 Bandsman William John Griffiths was remembered lovingly by his wife and by his brother Walter and family – “twas nobly that he died; . . . To fight for liberty and right, . . .”. He was remembered again in 1917, by his mother and her family – “We miss thee and mourn thee in silence unseen, And dwell on the memory of days that have been”, and by his brother Walter and his wife – “Gone but not forgotten.” In 1919 his mother remembered – “The war is o’er, his sun has set. But we, who loved him, can never forget.”

In 1919 his widow Maud married Samuel Harris, and was living in Greymouth, where advice regarding William's medals was sent. She later married a Mr Clements and died in 1971 in

Auckland. Her ashes are interred in the Hillsborough Cemetery with a 9-year old son, Stanley John Harris.

Two of William's brothers - Edwin John Griffiths and Walter Robert Griffiths - were recorded on the World War I Reserve Rolls, Edwin later enlisting and serving in New Zealand and again in World War II. Their father died in 1920 and their mother in 1924, both buried in Auckland. William's son Victor served in World War II.

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