

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

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### Trooper Thomas Ryce KENNEDY, No.7/1253

Thomas Ryce Kennedy, known as Tom, was the younger son of Michael and Ellen (née Rice) Kennedy, of Winchester and later of Murray Street, Temuka. Michael and Ellen were both from Ireland – Michael from Tipperary and Ellen from Kerry. Born on 17 August 1892 at Winchester and baptised on 11 September in the Temuka Catholic parish, Tom was educated at the local school, Winchester Public School, before finishing off at the Marist Brothers School in Timaru. He was a very keen sportsman, being a good rifle shot, and participating in athletic sports, proficient especially in boxing.

Thomas lived at home and was employed in farm work, on his father's or a neighbouring farm. He was one of a number of territorials and senior cadets who were fined in August 1914 for failing to attend evening drills, his fine being 20 shillings. He did have experience before the war with the 8th South Canterbury Mounted Rifles. On April 1915, along with 122 other locals, T. R. Kennedy of the 8th Regiment of the Sixth Reinforcements, left Timaru by special train, en route for service at the front.

On 14 August 1915 he was on his way to Suez with the Canterbury Mounted Rifles. On his way Thomas was affected by pyrexia (fever) and was admitted to hospital on arrival at Cairo. He contracted fever at Gallipoli and was invalided back to Egypt. In March 1917 he was in hospital at Cairo, suffering from malaria and influenza. He had many visits to hospital or casualty clearing stations in the first few months of 1917.

Thomas Kennedy saw active service at Gallipoli and in Egypt. At the capture of Beersheba he suffered wounds which sent him to hospital. The next day, 6 November 1917, at the age of 25, he died at Beersheba Hospital, Palestine, of those wounds. His mother, by then living at Orari, received a cable to this effect on about 13 November. The report had been made by the Officer Commanding Anzac Receiving Station. The *Timaru Herald* casualty list gave his name as Thomas Royce Kennedy. A week later, in the *Temuka Leader*, Mr and Mrs Kennedy acknowledged the messages of sympathy. Tom had been very popular and was much missed by his many friends. A death notice – For the Empire's Cause – appeared in the New Zealand Catholic paper of 6 December.

Early in 1918, Mrs. M. Kennedy, of Murray Street, Temuka, late of Winchester, received a letter from Rev. Father (Chaplain) A. F. McDonald, with the N.Z. Forces in Palestine, under date December, relating the death of her son: -

“Early last month you will have learned that your boy, 11/1252, Thos. Kennedy, 8th Canterbury Mounted Rifles, with other brave comrades made the supreme sacrifice. Tom had come safely through the first big day's fight at Beersheba on October 31. On Sunday night (November 4) we were suddenly pushed out into some very rough country along the road to Jerusalem, six miles north-east of Beersheba, to hold up some strong Turkish counter-attacks. Next day, Monday, 5th, saw us in a rocky gully exposed to heavy shrapnel fire. I left the gully myself under machine-gun fire to bury a Catholic boy, and at the dressing-station was told that Tom was coming through, shot through the stomach. I attended to some of my boys brought out wounded, and as it was too late to think of finding my way back to the regiment, who were to be relieved at any moment, I stayed near the ambulance, and about 2am on Tuesday (November 6), I was fortunate enough to find Tom in the last ambulance cart to come in. Abdominal wounds are always very dangerous, so I told Tom his wound was serious and that I was going to give him the last Sacrament. Poor Tom, he had always been a fine lad and splendid Catholic, and he received the last rites in splendid disposition. He asked me to write you and send all his best love if anything happened to him. An ambulance van was waiting and hurried him towards Beersheba. That was the last I saw of him. From the Canterbury Regiment I learned later that he had succumbed. RIP. My dear Mrs. Kennedy, he was a son to be proud of, a brave soldier and a good practical Catholic, and I can assure you his comrades will miss his sunny cheerful presence. Accept my sincere sympathy for yourself and family. As a Catholic mother you will be consoled by his splendid end. I have been able to offer the Holy Sacrifice for the eternal rest of his soul.” [*New Zealand Tablet*, 7 March 1918]

Thomas Ryce Kennedy was buried in the Beersheba Military Cemetery, Palestine, Israel, the Rev. H. R. Gordon, Chaplain to the Forces, officiating. Thirty-one New Zealanders are buried in this cemetery which was created on the fall of Beersheba which was attacked on 31 October 1917. A memorial is worked on his parents' stone in the Temuka Cemetery. His name is inscribed on the Timaru Memorial Wall, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart Memorial, the Geraldine War Memorial, the Temuka RSA Roll of Honour, the Temuka War Memorial, the St Joseph's Church, Temuka Memorial and the Winchester War Memorial.

*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)*