

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

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Sergeant John Rogers Howard, No.2/67A

By Carol Bell

John Rogers Howard (Jack) was born in Geraldine on 10 March 1891, the son of Eliza Hannah and Henry Rogers Howard, and attended Geraldine Primary School and Geraldine District High School. He also attended the Sunday school at St Mary's Anglican Church for many years and was an active member of the Geraldine Oddfellows Lodge.

Howard became a farrier for blacksmith and coach builders J.C. Martin in Geraldine and listed shoeing smith among his list of accomplishments at the time of his enlistment on 13 August 1914. He had also completed three years' service with the Geraldine Volunteer Rifle brigade. He was 23 years old, 5ft 7½in tall, 154lbs, of fair complexion with hazel eyes and light brown hair, and of good general health. He named his father as next of kin, but on the death of his father in 1916 this was changed to be his mother Eliza, by then living at 7 Matilda St, Timaru.

Trooper John Howard embarked with the Canterbury Mounted Rifles on 16 October 1914 but was transferred to the artillery in 1915 as a farrier in the 2nd Battery of NZ Field Artillery. He disembarked at Alexandria in December 1914 and saw action all the way through the Gallipoli campaign. By January 1916 he was back in Egypt at Moascar Camp where he was promoted to Farrier Sergeant and it was with this rank that he embarked for France and the Somme campaign in April 1916. A January 1917 reorganisation saw the 2nd Brigade which included the Second Battery detached from the New Zealand Division. The 2nd (Army) Brigade served as a movable artillery unit under British command fighting at Messines (June 1917) and Nieuport (June–December 1917) before returning to the main action to oppose the German Spring Offensive (March–July 1918) and take part in the Advance to Victory (July–November 1918).

Sergeant Howard was on leave in the UK in August 1917 and on 2 February 1918 he was "detached to the UK for a tour of duty" but he rejoined the 2nd Battery in May as the Allies struggled to hold back the Spring Offensive – a last-ditch attempt by the

Germans to gain ascendancy after the Russian withdrawal from the war and before the overwhelming resources of the United States could be fully deployed. Some gains were made before the Allied victory at the Battle of Amiens heralded the Hundred Days Offensive in which an ascendant Allied assault pushed the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line.

Jack Howard was killed in action on 1 October as the Allies pushed towards Cambrai. He died at Le Cateau and was buried in Anneux British Cemetery, Nord, France. His medals were sent to his mother at 7 Matilda St, Timaru. The Temuka Leader of 22 October 1918 reported: The latest casualty list contains the names of two more Geraldine young men who have laid down their lives in the great war – Sergeant John Rogers Howard, and Lance-corporal Leonard Thomas Carver, the former was killed in action and the latter died of wounds. Both young men were well known and highly esteemed throughout the Geraldine district and much sympathy will be felt for their bereaved relatives.

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