

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 11 March 2017

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William Thomas Clarke, No.35006

William Thomas Clarke was the second son of George Ishmael William and Annie Elizabeth Eva (Betsy, née Walters) Clarke, of North Branch, Milton; his father being later of 42 Villa St., Masterton, Wairarapa, where he died in 1927. He was born at Geraldine on 16 June 1893 and received his early education at Scotsburn (Peel Forest) School. His father George arrived at Tautaku, South Otago, on 5 November 1901, bringing his mill from Peel Forest, South Canterbury. Because of his father's poor health, the family went into dairy farming at North Branch, Milton; the mill was operated by a relative and other managers until all the assets including the mill and timber rights were sold in 1913. Prior to enlistment William was a partner in the family firm of Messrs G. W. Clarke and Sons, dairy farmers, and was a farmer residing at home at North Branch, Milton in 1914.

W. T. Clarke, Infantry, of Milton, was part of the South Otago quota of the 20th Reinforcements - a number which exceeded the allotted quota - who departed from Milton by the 24 August 1916 morning express. While in camp in September 1916, Private W. T. Clarke of J Company 20th Reinforcements, was temporarily appointed a lance-corporal. He embarked on the Opawa at Wellington on 2 January 1917, destined for London, then overseas on 28 May.

William was to die at Passchendaele just over four months later. He was killed in action on 4 October 1917, aged 23 years and 4 months, and was initially buried between Otto Farm and Tofel Passchendaele Road (probably where he fell in the field). Subsequently he was interred in the Poelcapelle British Cemetery at West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. His name appeared in the 'Bruce Herald' "Death Roll" of 25 October 1917.

William had taken a keen interest in Presbyterian Church activities, and was a tenor horn player in the 14th Regimental Band (South Otago Regiment with which he was serving at the time of enlisting). While in camp William drew up a will, appointing his father as executor and bequeathing all his real and personal estate, including life insurance policies to his father. His older brother George John Clarke enlisted but was not medically fit enough to serve overseas, and another brother, Donald Charles Clarke, was called up but did not enlist. William Clarke's name is inscribed on the Timaru Memorial Wall, the Geraldine War memorial and the Bruce Fallen Soldiers Memorial at Milton, Otago.

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