

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

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By Teresa Scott

### Private William Polaschek, No.14144

William Polaschek was born on 30 June 1881 (not 1885 as recorded on his file) at Temuka. His birth was not registered until 1884 and in January 1887 an order was granted in the Temuka Magistrate's Court to enable Teresa Polaschek to adopt him. William's birth name is unknown, and whether there was any relationship. Teresa and her husband Josef Polaschek, with nine-year old son Josef, of Austria, came to New Zealand by the Rakaia in 1874, both aged 35. They had left Hamburg for London on 26 December 1873. Teresa died in 1894, a widow, 59 years old, "after an illness of 18 years". Josef senior died shortly after their arrival in New Zealand.

Willie was educated at Joseph's Catholic School, Temuka. There he was a regular performer in the annual school concerts. At the 1892 Easter Sunday High Mass, young William, not yet 11 years old, was one of two boys who sustained the bass solos in the Mass and he regularly sang at district events. While his brother Joseph was very much involved in sports, Willie was into singing and performing. But in 1902 William rode in the Temuka Bicycle Club's road race from Temuka to Orari and back. In August 1908 he was present on Laddy at a hunt with the hounds at Mr P. Wareing's homestead.

Prior to the war William engaged in farm labouring work mostly in the Temuka area, with stints at Studholme Junction and Otaio. In March 1916, a ploughman residing at Styx, William was one of the men medically examined at the King Edward Barracks in Christchurch. He named his brother Joseph Polaschek, of Styx, Canterbury, as his next-of-kin. Joseph, who was born about 1864 and was attending Milford School in 1878, was his half-brother. Three months later he embarked on the Tahiti with the 5th Reinforcements, destined for Devonport, England. After training at Sling he proceeded overseas. Twice shortly before his death he was admitted to hospital and the Field Ambulance (sickness and hernia) but was soon back in the field. He was killed in the assault on Ridge Hill on 12 October 1917, falling on New Zealand's blackest day, having been exactly twelve months in the firing -line.

Lieut. Ivor George Prichard wrote to Joseph from France – "On the 13th [sic] he (William) was one of those who volunteered for stretcher-bearing, and all that day helped to carry his wounded comrades through mud, in places up to his waist. He arrived back to us in the support line about 5 pm, and, having scraped his puttees, was in the act of putting them on a tree to become as dry as possible when a shell landed near him, killing him instantly by the concussion. We could not carry his body out, so we buried him in No Man's Land, now our territory." One of the hundreds whose bodies were not later recovered, Private William Polaschek is honoured on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, West-Vlaanderen,

Belgium. His name is recorded on the Timaru Memorial Wall, the Temuka War Memorial, the Temuka RSA Roll of Honour and the Temuka St Joseph's Church Memorial.

William's medals (British War Medal and Victory Medal), plaque and scroll were despatched to his foster brother Joseph, by then of 14 Byron St., Sydenham, Christchurch. No will was left and in 1919 Joseph made a claim for any pay due to William.

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