

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 6 October 2018

Private Jeremiah Bartholomew O'NEILL, No.27350

By Teresa Scott

Jeremiah Bartholomew O'Neill was the son of J. B. D. and Mary (née Healy) O'Neill, of Rahalisk, Ballinagree, Macroom, County Cork, Ireland. Born on 20 July 1889, at Macroom, Co Cork, Ireland, he came to New Zealand in 1911, leaving from London on 15 September 1911 with the Shaw, Savill & Albion Co on the Athenic and arriving at Wellington on 1 November, single and a farm labourer, nominated by his uncle M. Healy (per Labour Department, Christchurch). By 1914 he was a labourer for J. Gaffaney at Seadown.

Jeremiah B. O'Neill registered on 11 May 1916 at the Timaru Defence Office, and enlisted on 31 May 1916. At that time he was still working as a farm hand for J. Gaffaney, Temuka. His nominated next of kin was his father, Mr J. B. D. O'Neill in Ireland; he also gave Mrs M. Healy, a friend, of Shaw Street, Temuka as a contact. With the South Canterbury quota of the 17th Reinforcements, he left Timaru by the second north-going express on 31 May 1916.

While on final leave in August 1916, Privates O'Neill and McKenna were guests at an evening in the Seadown schoolroom. Mr S. Cain, presiding, said that the two men were going to sacrifice all that was near and dear to them to keep the gaps [in the ranks] filled. He had not known Private O'Neill for long but "he was sure that he could not be anything but good, or he would not have been in Gaffney Bros employ for so long a time."

He embarked with the 17th Reinforcements of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, on 25 September 1916, per the Devon, from Wellington, and destined for Devonport, England. On 8 December he proceeded overseas from Sling Camp. Engaged with the Canterbury

Infantry Regiment, he was one of a large number from all regiments who were wounded on 7 June 1917 in France. His uncle, Mr M. Healy, Temuka, received a cable to this effect. J. B. O'Neill's was not a severe case. He had suffered a gunshot wound (slight) to his left arm and was admitted to the Field Ambulance then to the 11th Casualty Clearing Station, and subsequently to the No. 3 Australian General Hospital at Abbeville, France, before being transferred to the Base Depot in France and rejoining his battalion in late July. The next newspaper notification came by way of Casualty List No. 694 published on 19 October 1917, his being one of about 230 deaths recorded. Private Jeremiah Bartholomew O'Neill, No. 27350, was killed in action on 29 September 1917 at Ypres, Belgium, aged 28 years. He was buried in the Nine Elms British Cemetery, Poperinge, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, this cemetery having been opened in September 1917 in preparation for the 1917 Battle of Ypres.

Jeremiah was regarded as a steady, hard-working, reliable young man in the Temuka district, and he was well liked by all who knew him. He had worked on various farms in the district, including Seadown, and for Mrs Gaffaney at Arowhenua for about three years prior to enlistment. Jeremiah Bartholomew O'Neill signed a will on 23 August 1916 at Trentham Military Camp, the witness being Leo J. Daly, chaplain to the forces. He bequeathed the whole of his estate to his mother, Mrs Mary O'Neill, Rahalisk, Ballinagree, Macroom, Co Cork, Ireland – £173.1.8. in the Post Office Savings Bank and £20 funeral benefit. The British War Medal and Victory Medal were sent to his father. He was also eligible for the memorial plaque. His nephew, Jerome Healy, served in World War II.

Jeremiah O'Neill's name is inscribed on the Timaru Memorial Wall, Temuka RSA Roll of Honour, Temuka War Memorial, St Joseph's Church Temuka Memorial, and on the Seadown War Memorial.

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