

GREAT WAR STORIES

Thomas Alfred Sanders

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

TERESA SCOTT

Thomas Alfred Sanders was the third son of Frank and Jane Sarah (née Tuthill) Sanders, of 47 Birket Street, Temuka, South Canterbury.

Born on April 6, 1892, he was educated at Rangitira Valley and Temuka schools, and the Temuka District High School. At Rangitira Valley Thomas featured in the prize list in 1900.

Not all his schooling days were as pleasantly memorable though. On September 21, 1904 he met with a painful accident in the Temuka District High School playground. He was running round the school when he collided with another lad and fell, injuring his leg.

The doctors discovered that he had suffered a dislocated knee and a fracture of the leg above the knee. After the leg had been set in an adjoining house, he was taken home. Thomas went on to learn his

plumbing trade at Temuka. About 1911 he went to the North Island, accepting an appointment with the Hamilton Hardware Company, in Hamilton.

In 1914 Thomas and two brothers, Joseph and Frank, were all living in Hamilton. Thomas enlisted at the outbreak of war, his next-of-kin being his father Frank Sanders of Temuka.

He was already serving with the 16th Waikato Regiment. With the Waikato Company, he was at the mobilisation camp at Auckland in September 1914, one among some 2100 men. He was a well-built young man, standing 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighing 162 pounds, and he was in good health.

On October 16, 1914 he was on his way, with the Auckland Infantry Battalion, to Egypt. At Alexandria, on April 12, 1915, he embarked for Gallipoli. Soon after landing, or on landing, Private 12-865 T. A. Sanders was wounded in the right forearm at the

Dardanelles. He was admitted to the 15th General Hospital at Alexandria and then transferred to the convalescent camp. After recovering and being discharged from hospital, Thomas was sent to the front again.

But before long – in August 1915 – he was evacuated to Malta, slightly sick, suffering debility and with septic knees. Sick and wounded, he was admitted to Suffolk Hall Hospital at Cheltenham, England. On November 14, 1915 Thomas was one of the men “ready again for the fray” who returned to active service.

He was appointed acting lance corporal but relinquished the appointment the following day.

Thomas then embarked for France in April 1916, and was transferred to a trench mortar battery. On September 26, 1916, however, after some ten months of further service, he was wounded again.

This time there was to be a



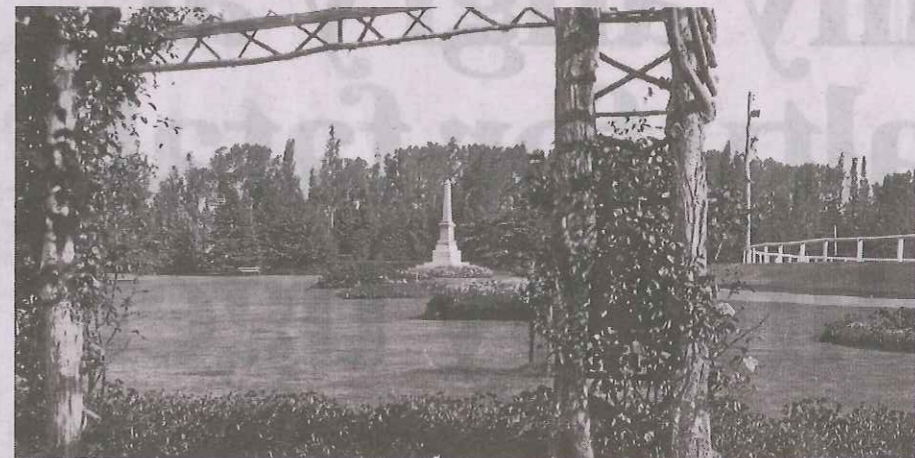
Thomas Sanders
PHOTO: AUCKLAND WEEKLY NEWS

tragic outcome. His father received the following telegram from the Defence Department – “London advises to-day, Saunders in 2nd London Hospital, Chelsea, right buttock, legs, and scalp, and progressing favourably.”

Subsequently though Thomas was reported missing believed killed in action. The family received no further news until a Court of Enquiry confirmed on January 5, 1917 that he had been killed in action on September 26, 1916, at the Somme.

The next telegram, in early January 1917, stated that “his [Mr F. Saunders’] son, Private T. A. Sanders, previously reported wounded, is now reported missing, and believed to have been killed in action on September 26th.”

The earlier report of wounding



The Temuka War Memorial, circa 1940.
PHOTO: SOUTH CANTEBRURY MUSEUM 2951

seems to have been a tragic mistake.

Messages of sympathy were received from His Majesty, His Excellency the Governor, and Hon. James Allen.

Thomas’s father was for many years a member of the Temuka District High School committee, which expressed sympathy to his family and all stood in silence when the chairman proposed a motion of sympathy.

“Corporal Saunders was a fine type; of young man, whom to know was to like and respect, and much sympathy is felt for Mr and Mrs Saunders and family.”

At the annual meeting of the parish of Temuka and Winchester in May 1917, the vicar recorded they were “All gallant lads, the brave and the true who have died

the death of honour and departed, as we trust in the hope of resurrection to eternal life”.

In 1922 the Temuka Borough memorial was unveiled before a very large gathering in the domain, including Temuka Territorials and Cadets, Temuka and Geraldine returned soldiers, the Temuka Pipe Band, the Salvation Army Band, the children of the district schools, national and local dignitaries, and local folk.

Opening proceedings, the Mayor said: “We regret that this occasion has arisen, but having done so we must look back with pride at the actions of those who rose to the call of the Motherland, which was in peril. Many of those brave boys who left these shores did not return, and we have erected this memorial to their

memory . . . “Fourteen month earlier the original Roll of Honour erected at the Temuka District High School was unveiled in June 1921 in the presence of large gathering, comprising nearly all the pupils of the school and some hundreds of adults.

The chairman commented: “These men went forth to do battle for right against a strong and mighty foe, knowing that they might not return to their own again.

“It was therefore our duty as fellow citizens to do something to keep their names ever green in our minds and hearts.”

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