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Features

GREAT WAR STORIES

Corporal William Rutledge Menzies

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

CAROL BELL

William Rutledge Menzies was born on 26 December, 1896, in Chalmers St, Oamaru. His father was William Menzies, a draper, from Perthshire, Scotland, who emigrated to New Zealand about 1879. His mother was Catherine Jane, nee Rutledge. She came from Fermanagh, Ireland, and arrived in NZ in 1880 on the ship Opawa.

William Snr and Catherine married on 2 July 1895 in Oamaru, North Otago and their son, William Rutledge Menzies, was an only child.

The family moved to Waimate and lived on Timaru Rd. William Snr was manager of drapery at CFCA in Waimate.

William Junior (called Willie by relatives) was schooled in Waimate before going onto Timaru Boys' High School, Timaru.

He was a pupil at TBHS in 1915, a Sub-Prefect and a boarder. In 1916 he was an assistant staff member.

William embarked on 15 August 1917 at Wellington with the NZEF 29th Reinforcements Canterbury Infantry Regiment, C Company. His first known rank was lance corporal, then he was promoted to corporal, before reverting to private at his own request.

William fought in the Somme Offensive of 21 March to 5 April, 1918 and was killed in action on 5 April, aged 21.

A letter, received by his father from his son's comrade W Lindsay, was printed in The Timaru Herald on 31 May, 1918.

This described how "William was in charge of a Lewis machine-gun, and he was busy wiping out the enemy when he was slightly wounded by shrapnel in the leg and arm, and, as the enemy were still advancing he refused to vacate his post, and stuck to his machine-gun, using it with deadly effect, when he was sniped

through the head. He died of this wound several hours later. However he passed away peacefully, as the blow on the head left him unconscious. We regret his loss very much as he proved himself a very brave soldier, and a splendid comrade. He won the admiration of all who knew him for his coolness and bravery, and as a section leader."

William Rutledge Menzies is buried in Martinsart British Cemetery, Somme, France, and remembered on the Cenotaph on Queen St, in Timaru, as well as in Waimate, on the archway to the Public Gardens.

His name is also on the Honours Board in the Timaru Boys' High Memorial Library.

■ This is part of the SCroll project. You can find SCroll stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll



William Rutledge Menzies



Martinsart British Cemetery, Somme, where Menzies is buried.

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