

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

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Rifleman Aubrey Edward Thompson, No.49026

By Teresa Scott

Aubrey Edward Thompson was born 14 April 1882 at Timaru, the third son of James and Annie Elizabeth (née Robson) Thompson. His early education was at Pleasant Point School, where his father was headmaster for many years. James Thompson, from Northern Ireland, died in 1913 in Christchurch. Aubrey was a cheesemaker for the Barry's Bay Dairy Company at Barry's Bay, Akaroa, when he was called up in January 1917. In earlier days he had been a farm labourer at Aylesbury where the family resided for a time and at Kawhia in the Waikato. He had previously served with the Waimakariri Mounted Rifles.

Of relatively small build, single and of Church of England affiliation, Aubrey enlisted on 17 February 1917 and nominated as next-of-kin his English-born mother, then living at 119 Hawthorne Road, Cashmere. He left Christchurch on 7 March 1917. The men had mustered at King Edward Barracks, where they were addressed by the Mayor of Christchurch. The CYC and CDC bands accompanied the draft as they marched to the station, where they boarded a special train for Lyttelton. A large crowd gathered at the station to cheer the departing men; and relatives travelled to Lyttelton to wave goodbye from the wharf.

Rifleman A. E. Thompson embarked with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade of the 25th Reinforcements on the Turakina on 26 April 1917 from Wellington, destined for Plymouth, England. He had been transferred from the rank of private to that of rifleman the week before. Loaded with infantry reinforcements on its only voyage as a troopship, the Turakina set sail in the company of another troopship, Tofua. Together they carried 2127 soldiers and crew. The route took in Sydney, Fremantle, Durban, Cape Town and Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. At Durban teams from the two ships played a rugby game, the Turakina side winning 9-3. This was one of the last troopships to take the route across the Indian Ocean.

Rifleman Thompson's time with the forces was to be abruptly cut short. An entry in *The Klink*, the magazine of the soldiers on the Turakina, records that one soldier did not survive the voyage. "It was not given to Private A E Thomson [sic] to reach the battlefield to take part in the glory and pomp of war; but he died none the less in the execution of his duty, and in answer to his country's call." The soldier was buried at sea after a "touching and beautiful service". Aubrey Thompson was admitted to the ship's hospital on 28 May, just a month into his journey. He died of sickness – broncho-pneumonia - on 28 May 1917, at sea, in the Indian Ocean, on his way to the United Kingdom, aged 35 years. The official cause of death was recorded as pneumonia and heart failure. Initially it was reported that he had died of wounds. He was buried at sea at 8am the following day. The obituary in

The Klink concludes: “Our comrade’s grave is marked only by the Southern Cross, his sole requiem is the call of the wheeling sea-bird, his sleep is in the everlasting waters.”

A memorial stone to Aubrey E. Thompson, of the 25th Reinforcements, is placed on his parents’ grave in the Linwood Cemetery, Christchurch. The name of 49026 A. E. Thompson is engraved on the Canterbury Provincial Memorial in Christchurch, and the Pleasant Point School War Memorial. His sister Margaret Hepple Thompson who served as a nurse in World War One, died in 1921, her death resulting from war service. A younger brother, Eric Dudley Thompson born in 1893 at Rakaia also served in World War One.

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