

Spr H. Rhoades – New Zealand Engineers

Harry Rhoades was born in Spitalfields in 1887, the son of Frederick and Emma Rhoades who moved with their children to Westcott in 1898. The 1901 census describes Frederick, then aged 55, as a retired grocer. They lived in Orby Villa, which they named after a village in Lincolnshire, where Frederick may have lived before moving to London. Today the house is called Longacre, and stands on the Guildford Road.

On 5th July 1911 Harry sailed from London, apparently as an emigrant, on board the ss *Ruapehu*, bound for Wellington, New Zealand. In January 1916 he enlisted in 'D' Company of the Otago Infantry Battalion and on 22nd February left New Zealand for Egypt with 9th Reinforcements on board ss *Dalmore*. He arrived in Egypt on 31st March 1916 and it appears to have been around this time that he transferred to the New Zealand Engineers. He was a carpenter, one of the trades they would have required.

The New Zealand Engineers comprised a HQ Company and three Field Companies whose role was to provide engineer support to the New Zealand Division – constructing trenches, strong points and entanglements in its defensive role and building roads, bridges and other infrastructure to support an advance. The Division was part of the 1st ANZAC Corps which had just been formed, in February 1916, following the evacuation from Gallipoli. The Corps participated in the defence of the Suez Canal before being transferred to the Western Front in the Spring of 1916.

The New Zealand Division left Alexandria on 5th April and by 12th May had taken over part of the line at Armentieres. The 1st ANZAC Corps was involved in the later phases of the Battle of the Somme and subsequently played a distinguished part in the Battles of Messines, Passchendaele and in resisting the German Spring offensive of 1918. Throughout these actions the Corps became renowned for its ability and fighting spirit and, with the Canadians, were increasingly called on take key roles in the final stages of the war.

We do not know which Field Company Harry Rhoades served in with the New Zealand Engineers. The New Zealand records show that he served in France and it is certain that he would have been involved in at least some of the actions mentioned above. It was in April 1918 while serving in France that he became seriously ill with trench fever and was transferred to

hospital in England. On 24th June 1918 he died in No 1 New Zealand General Hospital at Brockenhurst in Hampshire and was buried in the hospital cemetery which is in the churchyard of St Nicholas', Brockenhurst.

Due to its proximity to the port of Southampton, its railway connections and the number of large houses in the area, Brockenhurst was chosen in 1915 by the War Office to become a hospital centre. It was used initially for the treatment of Indian troops and then became the No 1 New Zealand General Hospital when the Indian Divisions were replaced by ANZAC troops. The hospital cemetery contains the graves of 93 New Zealand servicemen, together with four other service and civilian personnel.