

Cyril Saunderson Spear.

Cyril Saunderson Spear was the son of the late Frederick and Lucy Burnfield Spear of Nelson. His parents had married in 1868 in Nelson and Cyril was born on 7 August 1878. They had a large family of eleven children being: Henrietta Katherine; Morris John; Holdwell Wensley; Frederick Hone; Cyril Saunderson; Howard Walshe; Gertrude Louise; Pheobe Gordon; Elliot Vernon; Rachel Frances; Aubrey Rathgan.¹

His father was an insurance agent and the family lived in central Nelson.² Cyril attended Hope School briefly in March 1885, then Hampden Street School in Nelson November 1885. He transferred to Brightwater School in 1890.³

Cyril worked in Invercargill for The Southland Times and in New Plymouth between the years 1905-09. He worked, as a journalist, for the Nelson Evening Mail from age 17 years old until 1915, and then returned to work for The Nelson Evening Mail after the war.⁴

The Spear family had long ties to Motueka. Frederick and John Spear arrived in Nelson in 1858 and later moved to Riwaka where they ran a private school. John was later ordained as a minister in 1873. Frederick's son, Aubrey R Spear resided in Motueka. Cyril's second name derived from a family name as John and Fredrick's brother was called Saunderson.⁵ Cyril played representative hockey for Motueka against Wellington in December 17 August 1906.⁶

He enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force on 24 June 1915, from Ngatitama Street, Nelson. His serial number was 2/2346, B Battery Canterbury, 8th Reinforcements, Field Artillery. He embarked 13 November 1915.⁷

Cyril served in Egypt and on the Western Front. His war diaries, 1915-1919, describe the journey out to Egypt, his daily life there and later his experiences on the Western Front:

A 1916 extract dated 6 September:

"Sept 6 (On the Somme 7.45pm) Saw what were once villages quite demolished; bricks now used for [---] trees bare of all leaves etc, just dead looking; many cut off short + on way up just one continual stream of vehicles...troops everywhere in camp...trenches everywhere like ridges etc, destroyed villages..."⁸

He was appointed bombardier New Zealand Field Artillery 7 January 1916 at Zeitoun camp, near Cairo in Egypt and he embarked for France 7 April 1916. He was hospitalised in October and November 1916 for influenza and again in January 1918 for scabies.^{9a} He was back in New Zealand in May 1919 and was finally discharged on 8 July 1919.^{9b}

He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War medal and the Victory medals.

He married a nurse, Sister Ethel Hannah Barnes, on 20 October 1920 at St. James Church, Wellington. She was the daughter of Philip and Eleanor Barnes of Cornwall, England and the couple lived in Nelson.¹⁰ Ethel, who had served overseas as a nurse during the war, died in 1923 as a result of strains on her health suffered during the war years.¹¹

Cyril and Edith are buried at Wakapuaka Cemetery, Nelson; Cyril in the R.S.A. section and Ethel in the Church of England block.¹² When Cyril died on 13 April 1958,

A.R.Shaw, his brother, of King Edward Street, Motueka passed the information on to the N.Z. Defence Department.¹³

The Nelson Provincial Museum is fortunate to hold the Cyril Spear World War 1 diaries.

Endnotes

- 1 Spear Family, Biography File 1, A2050.
- 2 New Zealand Post Office Directories 1890-91 and 1921.
- 3 School Admission Registers
- 4 Spear Family Papers, UMS1128.
- 5 Murray Papers.
- 6 Motueka Star, 17 August 1907.
- 7 Spear, C, Cenotaph Database Record
- 8 Spear Diary, A2047.2
- 9a Spear, C, Military Personnel Record. Casualty form.
- 9b Spear, C, Military Personnel Record. History sheet.
- 10 Carnahan, Cheryl
- 11 Carnahan, Cheryl
- 12 Carnahan, Cheryl
- 13 Spear, C, Military Personnel Record. Notification of death.

Sources

Brightwater School Admission Register, 1888-1964. Transcribed by the Nelson Branch of the N.Z. Society of Genealogists. Nelson Provincial Museum.

Carnahan, Cheryl, Ethel Hannah Barnes, Nurses Research Project, 2014.

Hope School Admission Register, 1882-1967. Transcribed by the Nelson Branch of the N.Z. Society of Genealogists. Nelson Provincial Museum.

Motueka Star, 17 August 1906.

Murray Papers. Motueka and District Historical Association.

Spear Family Papers, Nelson Provincial Museum: Biography Files 1, A2050.

Spear Family Papers, 1919-1954. Nelson Provincial Museum: UMS1128, A2047 and A2050.

Spear, C.S. 1915-1916 Diary, Nelson Provincial Museum: A2047.2.

Spear, C, Cenotaph Database record, Auckland War Memorial Museum, URL: http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/SearchResults.aspx?Page=1&c_surname_search=spear&c_firstname_search=cyril+saunderson , accessed 13.5.2014.

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This Biography was compiled by Anna Wilkinson in 2014