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Thomas Henry Zoch
Private 2791

Thomas Henry Zoch was born in Deniliquin, NSW, on Christmas Day 1893, the eldest son of Joseph Stephen and Annie Zoch (nee Skene). The Zoch family then moved to Euroa, Yea and Arcadia in Victoria. However young Tom was looked after by Zoch relatives in Pyalong where he went to school.

It appears that in June 1915 Tom tried to enlist in Melbourne but was asked to be medically examined again as his chest measurement was below standard. He was then accepted on July 5, 1915 in Melbourne. What is interesting is that he enlisted under the name John Foster, stated that both parents were deceased and gave his next of kin as a friend Charles Kincaid of Boisdale, Victoria.

After training Tom (known as John) left Melbourne on the Star of Victoria on September 10, 1915 as part of the 9th Reinforcements, 7th Battalion bound for Egypt. He had been made a private, number 2791.

Tom saw action late in the Gallipoli campaign, and on return to Alexandria in Egypt took part in further training. He was transferred to the newly formed 59th Battalion on February 24, 1916. This Battalion was mostly made up of men from rural Victoria.

Following a bout of influenza he was transferred to the Western Front in France in June 1916. On July 19, the 59th took part in its first major battle at Fromelles. Attacking in the first wave, the 59th suffered heavy casualties, and Tom was shot in his left knee. He was transferred to England where he received treatment, took leave and rejoined his Battalion in France in April 1917.

His injuries prompted a change back to his birth name. On August 17, 1916, the Army Records Office in Melbourne informed Tom's next of kin, Charles Kincaid, that Tom had been injured. It would seem that Charles then decided to inform Tom's parents as his father Joseph wrote to the Army in August informing them that John Foster was his son and his name was Thomas Henry Zoch. This letter describes the circumstances which caused Tom to use another name. Tom had accumulated a debt owed to a storekeeper and the storekeeper told Tom he would be jailed if he did not pay. Tom then "ran away from home" and later joined the Army. On November 22, 1916 Thomas signed a statutory declaration saying he was Thomas Henry Zoch and the Army then altered his record.

Back in France, it is likely Tom took part in the Battle of Polygon Wood on September 26, 1917. With the collapse of Russia in October 1917, a major German offensive on the Western Front was expected in early 1918. This came in late March and the 5th Division moved to defend the sector around Corbie. During this defence, the 59th Battalion participated in the now legendary counter-attack at Villers-Bretonneux on 25 April. Tom was probably part of that attack.

Tom had experienced several bouts of sickness including during the rest of 1918. He returned to Melbourne on the Tras-os-Montes arriving on May 22, 1919. He was discharged from the army on July 15, 1919 after four years service.

Tom was awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His name is recorded on the Pyalong State School Honour Roll.

In 1922 Tom married Harriet Donovan and in April 1923 he gave his address as Anzac Ave, Seymour when applying for a War Service Homes grant. He received a carrier's licence in 1923 but soon after worked for many years on the railways. Tom died in January 1967 at Prahan and was buried in Springvale Cemetery.

