

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 6 May 2017

By Teresa Scott

Second Lieutenant Charles Frederick Wilkie, No.8/2181

Charles Frederick Wilkie, the younger surviving son of William Dick and Jane Henrietta (née Read) Wilkie, of Manse Street, Waimate, was born on 27 September 1892 at Allanton, Otago. After his education at Allanton (Otago) and Mosgiel schools, he joined the New Zealand Railways as a clerk in Dunedin.

Charles was already serving with the Railway Engineers. Of fairly slight build, sallow complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, he was found medically fit to serve. He was a non-commissioned officer among 172 men who were farewelled in Dunedin. The Mayor expressed the appreciation of the citizens for the effort the men were making on behalf of the Empire and wished them God-speed. Bishop Nevill wanted them to remember that it was God's battle they were fighting – "for justice and right and truth and honour and virtue". Headed by the Dunedin Pipe Band, the men set off along the street lined with relatives and friend for the station where they joined the men from Invercargill and Milton for Trentham.

Having enlisted early in the war, on 12 January 1915, Charles embarked on 13 June with the Otago Infantry Battalion, destined for Suez, Egypt. At Trentham he was attached to D Company, 4th Reinforcements.

In August 1915 at the Dardanelles C. F. Wilkie was promoted to corporal. Soon after, on 8 September 1915, he disembarked at Malta from Gallipoli and was admitted to St John's Hospital, slightly sick with gastritis. Having embarked on 25 October 1915 for England, on 1 November 1915 he was admitted to 2nd War Hospital Northfield, Birmingham, still suffering with gastritis. Charles left London to rejoin his unit on 1 March 1916, embarking at Alexandria for France per 'Llandoverly Castle'.

A return to England in September enabled him to join the officer cadet battalion and complete a course of training, resulting in recommendation for a commission and promotion. Posted to the Otago Regiment, he proceeded overseas to France to join his battalion. A notice in the London Gazette of 15 March 1917, announced that 8/2181 Corporal C. E. Wilkie was to be promoted to 2nd Lieutenant.

On 7 June 1917 he was admitted to the Field Ambulance, then to the 33rd Casualty Clearing Station. Twenty-four-year old Second Lieutenant Charles Frederick Wilkie, 8/2181, died on 7 June 1917 at Messines, in the Flanders area of Belgium, of wounds received in action. These were gunshot wounds to the lower jaw and he died while being treated in the 33rd Casualty Clearing Station in the field. He had seen service at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Although the Battle of Messines was a striking success, the New Zealanders paid a heavy price for success, not least the family of Charles Fredrick Wilkie. His sister, Nurse Marie H. Wilkie, had visited the family in Waimate not long before the news of the death of Charles was received and

before returning herself to the war zone. Three other sisters were residing with their parents at Waimate and a fourth was an instructor at the Westport Technical School.

The name of 2nd Lieutenant C. E. Wilkie was submitted in Sir Douglas Haig's Despatch of 7 November 1917 (and published in the London Gazette of 28 December) as deserving of special mention. The Gazette carried the following citation – "Operations Messines - 7th June 1917. For gallantry and devotion to duty. Preparatory to the above operations, 2/Lieut Wilkie went out on seven successive nights into No Man's Land and carried out the most valuable reconnaissances of the Steenebeek and of the ground in front of the enemy's front line between Wulverghern and Messines. He and his party were repeatedly under heavy shellfire, but in spite of these conditions he carried out his task successfully and brought back most valuable information. The result of his investigations greatly facilitated the advance of the division. He was mortally wounded in the attack on Messines 7 June 1917."

Charles Frederick Wilkie was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord, France

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