

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 9 December 2017

Samuel Gibbings HAWKES No.5861 AIF

By Teresa Scott

Samuel Gibbings Hawkes, born on 14 September 1873 in Dunedin, was the third son of Richard Neville Nettles and Jean (née Black) Hawkes who had come to New Zealand from Australia in the late 1860s. Samuel was educated at Arthur Street School in central Dunedin and then the Normal School, Dunedin. In 1886 at Arthur Street Samuel was the recipient of two prizes – for first place in Standard IV Boys and first place in mental arithmetic. These awards were presented by Sir Robert Stout, a Scotsman who championed education in early New Zealand. The following year at the Normal School Samuel received an award for Standard V Class I.

While employed as a clerk in Dunedin, Mr S. G. Hawkes was one of the players who participated in a novel chess match. Mr J. Edwards (ex-champion of New Zealand and Otago) played simultaneously ten matches against ten distinct players. Within one hour and a quarter Mr Edwards had won eight games, drawn one and lost one. Samuel was among the losers. A few weeks later (August 1905) he competed in a series of friendly matches to “determine the best player among habitues of the chess room” at the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute. Samuel’s father died in 1900 in Dunedin and some years later his mother moved to Timaru where his brother Richard and sister, Mrs A. Washer, were living.

By 1913 Samuel and his brother Philip had moved to Western Australia, where Samuel was engaged in teaching. In March 1916 S. G. Hawkes gave £2. 2s. cash towards the Dowerin Queen Carnival movement. The following month he was one of 31 men dealt with by the recruiting officers at the Drill Hall and one of the 22 accepted as fit for service. And so in 1916 Samuel and Philip enlisted with the West Australian Expeditionary Force, Samuel being a State school teacher at Dowerin. Philip, a married man, was fortunate enough to return home but lost his wife in 1919.

Samuel Gibbings Hawkes embarked on 30 October 1916 at Fremantle, with the 27th Infantry Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force, on the “Port Melbourne”. He was of quite slight build and already 43 years old. Before reaching Devonport he was admitted to the ship’s isolation hospital where he was treated for disease. On 8 February 1917 he proceeded from Folkstone to France.

There was no more news in New Zealand until November 1917. Private Samuel Gibbings Hawkes was wounded on 28 October and embarked on the hospital ship St Andrew for England on 1 November. A cable was received in Timaru on 20 November, advising his family – mother, sister Mrs A. Washer, and older brother Richard’s family that he had died on 7 November 1917 at Queen Mary’s Military Hospital, Whalley, Lancashire, England of wounds received on active service at Passchendaele. He had, in fact, been gassed and suffered from shell gas and burns, resulting in cardiac failure. Notice of his death appeared in the *Timaru Herald* and the leading Dunedin newspapers. Some other newspapers reported his death with the Australian forces as “Died, cause not stated”, as did *The Daily News* of Perth, Western Australia and the *Western Argus* of Kalgoorlie, in December 1917. He was given a military funeral, with a polished elm coffin draped in the Australian flag, and buried in a private family grave in London Road Cemetery, Bromley, Kent. Present at the funeral were his sister Mrs Holworthy, her husband and her son.

Letters of Administration in the estate of Samuel Gibbons [sic] Hawkes, late of Dowerin, were granted to Philip Hawkes in September 1919, for the value of £115. 4s. 11d. On 19 February 1934 at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, Philip Hawkes made a Statutory Declaration that both parents of the late No 5861 Private Samuel Gibbings Hawkes were deceased and that he was the eldest surviving brother of the deceased soldier. He duly received the Victory Medal and Memorial plaque and scroll for his brother.

Samuel Hawkes was an uncle of Richard Neville Hawkes who was killed in action on 12 October 1917. His name is recorded at panel 110 of the Australian War Memorial. He is remembered on his mother’s stone in the Timaru Cemetery, as is his nephew. Jean Hawkes, who died in 1919, lost her son and her grandson in less than a month, as a consequence of the disaster of Passchendaele.

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