



*Jasper Wilkes*

## **Jasper William and George Oliver Wilkes**

By Alan McKenzie

William Riley Wilkes arrived in New Zealand on the *Peeress* in 1874.

He married Elizabeth Florence Coker in Timaru in 1884.

They had 12 children including George Oliver in 1890 and Jasper born in 1893.

All the children are recorded as attending the South School in Timaru.

Jasper enlisted for war service in October 1914 and was at that time a clerk for the Westland - Timaru Timber Company.

On 27 May 1915 he made his what was to be, short term landing at Gallipoli. Immediately after landing on the beach Jasper and other soldiers moved up and into the hills to the area of fighting. When they reached the field of fire he was later to record in a letter to his mother, "we kept pushing up closer (to the enemy) getting up and making a rush of about a dozen yards and then lying down. Each rush there would be somebody fall". The further they progressed up the hillside the more intense the fighting became. "There were fellows dropping all around me, and some shouting for help, some groaning and others praying for us to shoot them."

He was able to fire one shot before he was hit in the face by a Turkish marksman. Badly wounded he attempted to return to the shore but because of sniper fire had to shelter in a creek bed. Later, when night fell he crept down to the beach. Along with some Australian soldiers he found a boat. They managed to launch the boat and reached a ship and were later transferred to a hospital ship.. He was sent to a hospital in England where he wrote to his mother describing his injury. "The bullet hit me near the centre of lower lip knocking out about six of my back teeth and breaking my jaw. It then went through the floor of my mouth and then out of my neck." He also lost part of a finger. "I have to lie down with my head to the left when I drink. If not everything runs out through the hole in my neck."

In May 1916 he returned to New Zealand. He was discharged medically unfit, and granted 15shillings a week disability pension.

Brother Oliver George was not so lucky. Before he left for overseas he was in trouble with the law for stealing a five gallon keg of beer valued at 10/-. Apparently he had taken it overnight off a wagon that was parked at the Saltwater Creek Hotel. He seems to also have had minor problems with discipline in the army, reprimanded for several offences including "not saluting an officer". Oliver was killed in action in 1917. The Timaru Herald of 20<sup>th</sup>

February 1917 listed his name among those killed in action. He is buried in Y Farm Military Cemetery in France.

On his return to New Zealand Jasper worked in a variety of manual jobs. One job was in the North Island in a box factory. It was while he was there that he patented a locking system to keep fruit boxes secure on their way to the market. Later he went to Australia. From there he had little contact with his family but it is known he worked in the Queensland canefields. In the 1940's diagnosed with terminal cancer he did contact his family and a sister travelled to Australia to visit him and then brought him home to Timaru. He spent his last days at the family home in Buchanan Street and died there on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1945. It was his birthday. Jasper is buried in the soldiers section of the Timaru Cemetery.