

## **An Appreciation of the Boys**

**By NURSE WATT**

(From a Waimate Paper).

We have pleasure in being permitted to publish portion of a letter, received by the last mail, written to a resident of Waituna. As the writer, Sister Watt, was for some time on the nursing staff of the Waimate Hospital and is well-known by many residents of the town, her letter, dated 28th September from "Somewhere in France," will be of double interest. Her experience has evidently given her every opportunity of seeing the zeal and courage of our boys at the front, and this she bears eloquent testimony to in her letter. Surely such evidence should inspire any who may be affected with "cold feet" and warm their feelings to go also and "give a hand" to "do their bit." Nor is it to our boys and men alone that we must ascribe all the honour. The courage and endurance of the sisters who are nursing at the front, deserves our grateful thanks, for we fully recognise that Sister Watt, like many others, is doing her heroic woman's part to win the war. It is also, for this reason, we are pleased to publish her letter.

At present I am on night duty and have charge of four tents (200 patients). I have four orderlies and they are very good, so I am not overworked.

It is not the work itself that is so trying; it is the sadness and suffering that goes on all around that takes it out of me.

Poor boys, words can never describe what things we see and hear and the experiences some of us have had.

I left Samoa to come Home for experiences and adventures, and I have got them. Some of the experiences have been very trying, but still I don't mind as long as I can do a little bit for the boys who are doing so much for us.

Dear boys, I love them all. One sees only the best that is in them. They are made of real grit the boys we nurse away up here.

Often when I have been dressing their terrible wounds I tell them how sorry I am for them. They try to smile and always say, "Oh, sister, don't mind me, you ought to see my poor mate. He is lots worse than me."

It is the spirit like this that makes one feel they are made of the very best, Poor lads, my heart aches for them and their dear ones at home.

So many die of their awful wounds and one can't help thinking of some mothers or sweethearts heart broken when they get the news that the light of their very life is gone.

I have quite a number of Australians in my tents (Aussies, as we call them). They are lovely, clean, happy-hearted boys, who don't care a dash for anyone or anything. They live for the day, and to-morrow never worries them, and they suffer pain like lion-hearted men. Dear kids, they are part of their own lovely, sunny country.

They think the world of us out here, and would move heaven itself to do anything for us. We all love the Aussies and love to have some in each ward. They make things so cheerful for the poor Tommies.

The Canadians are lovely boys, too, especially the Scotch Canadians. One place I was at I had the dearest little curly-headed boy for an orderly. Little Jamie I used to call him; just a

boy who came all the way from Vancouver to do a little bit for the boys who were wounded and sick. I have heard the expression often of the people being like rays of sunshine, but I don't know when or where the expression could have been more aptly applied than to that little boy. I felt happy anywhere if that kid was near me. I was recalled from there to join up elsewhere, so have not seen him since.

Since coming to France I have seen quite a lot of places, but have not yet seen Paris. We are not allowed leave to there, but we are always waiting some fresh orders that come out. I think we are going to be allowed two days' leave. If so, we will have to make the pace to see it in two days.

I was very fortunate one day to be able to get to Belgium. I might tell you one does not need to be nervous to go there nowadays, but I took the chance, as it was worth it to be able to say that I have been in two countries on the Continent.

France and Belgium are most beautiful countries. Both are like tremendous gardens. Every inch of soil is cultivated right up to the firing line, and as they have practically no fences it looks just like a huge garden. Both countries are watered by canals, and you can imagine how pretty it is to walk along the banks at sunset and watch the old barges floating along, and see the sun setting behind an old church steeple or Dutch windmill. Really, when one sees a peaceful scene like that you wonder if there is a war, then suddenly the big guns open fire, and the sky is a blaze of light and the guns roar just like thunder.

As I am writing this, 2 a.m., the big guns are roaring not far away, and I can almost feel the table shake with them. I often think to myself how many boys are sent to eternity with each shot.

Oh God ! it is a terrible thing and it makes one wonder why these lovely boys are hurled to eternity, or wounded and maimed to finish out their life on earth. Boys, who in peace time, could have made life worth while. The ones that deserve our pity most are the poor laddies who are blinded. It is the most pathetic of all. So many have lost either or both eyes. It is so hard to try and keep it back from them when they ask and ask every day when will the bandages be taken off so that they can see. We try to keep it from them as long as ever we can, but of course they have to know sometime.

God alone knows the agony of mind those poor boys endure when they discover that they will never more see their dearest on earth nor see this beautiful old world of ours that we are given to enjoy. This is a sad, sad time we are living in. As the poor French peasants say when we speak to them: "Tres triste la guerre, Mademoiselle" (very sad the war, lady).

I know enough French to get what I want in the shops, and I generally have to act as interpreter if the girls are with me. Unfortunately my French is not always sufficient or correct, and some very amusing results have occurred, but we all enjoy the jokes, the French as well as ourselves.

*Kai Tiaki: the journal of the nurses of New Zealand.* 1 October 1925

(Papers Past) [21/04/2017]

### **Resignations and Appointments**

Miss Margaret Watt (Reserve N.Z.A.N.S.) has been appointed Matron of Wairoa Hospital, in succession to Miss Melville. Miss Watt was trained at Waimate Hospital, was on active service from 1915 to November, 1921, and, for a year, was Matron of Apia Hospital. Samoa.