

*Timaru Herald.* 4 April 1917 (Papers Past) [05/01/2025]

**A TIMARU BOY**  
WITH THE AUSTRALIANS.  
A GRUESOME PICTURE.

The following letter has been received by Mr George Hilton, of Timaru, from his son, Private Will Hilton, who left Australia for the Front with the Fifth Australian Infantry. He writes from a military hospital in London: —

“Just a few lines to let you know that I am getting better. I have been in hospital for nearly three weeks now, suffering from a severe attack of pleurisy. I got it just after the New Year. The last time we were in the trenches we got wet through and had wet clothes on for nearly three weeks. We spent Christmas and New Year in the lines, and it was very cold, rain and snow galore. Christmas dinner consisted of bully, beef and biscuits. We got our puddings and cakes when we came out as it was not possible to get them to the lines, as the rations had to be sent over at night time — a very risky job indeed. Our battalion has suffered awfully. There are only thirty-seven of us left. The battalion was 900 strong when we started, and we have gone through close on 4000 men, so it will give you a bit of an idea how we have been slopped up. We had one charge in which we lost over 300 men. ‘Trench feet’ is playing up with the men, some of whom get awful feet swollen up and they burst. I believe a lot have lost their legs through it. You can form no idea what it is like in France. Talk about mud, most of the time it is over your knees, and we had to cut the bottoms of our overcoats to get through it, as you stick like glue, and have to be careful of shell holes, or you will go over your neck.

“The place we were at last was Bapaume. We were also at Posieres. That’s where we suffered. It was simply murder there, each one waiting for his turn to be knocked out, but I am lucky. I lost most of my mates there, and burying them was almost impossible. The ground is simply covered with dead, a dreadful sight. They say the dead have rest, but one day I saw a poor fellow blown out of his grave. We buried him again, and put up a cross bearing the words: “Here lies a soldier of the King.” Some crosses have on them: “Somebody’s Darling at Rest,” and there are various other inscriptions. They have not been identified, so it is the only thing that can be done. Wherever you turn you see graves.

“I am glad you are as far away as you are, and that there is no chance of you getting your eyes on the place. I could not write about these things before, as the censor would not pass it. I don’t want to see France any more. Eleven months were enough for me. We are never in touch with the New Zealand boys.

“The hospital is a fine one, and very large. The night I got there it seemed like heaven after being in the cold tents. All your parcels must have been sent to the bottom, as I have not received one.”