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

**Private Leslie Garey Hopkins, No.3/1774**

**By Teresa Scott**

Leslie Garey Hopkins was the second son of Joseph Samuel and Kathleen Agatha (née Garey) Hopkins, of Otipua Rd, Hurdley St, and later 37 Evans St, Timaru. His grandfather, Joseph Harrop Hopkins, an importer in Christchurch, gave the name of Woolston to the Christchurch suburb where there is a street named after him, and also established the Woolston Emporium.

Leslie was born on 7 May 1891 in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The family had moved to Christchurch, New Zealand, by 1892. Leslie was educated at Opawa, Woolston and Bromley schools in Christchurch, and then at Gapes Valley School from 1904. He was well known and worked as a partner with his brother in chaff-cutting plant in the Geraldine and Kakahu districts. In 1914 he was living at home at Waimomoana, Geraldine, employed as a mill-hand. In August 1915 he was charged with failing to attend the annual training camp. The case was dismissed, however, as he had already offered his services for the Front.

Although he was residing and working at Tekapo, Leslie left Timaru on 23 September 1915, with three other South Canterbury men, for Palmerston North, to join the Ambulance Corps, and it was there that he enlisted. At his medical examination these remarks were inserted – "Has had no experience in ambulance work but is keen on it. Intelligent - passed 6th Standard".

On 5 February 1916 Leslie was on his way to Suez with New Zealand Field Ambulance No. 2, which served on the Western Front. He embarked at Alexandria for France in April. On 27 August he was admitted to the NZ No. 3 Field Ambulance for a few days. In early 1917 in France he spent three months with the Rifle Brigade before rejoining NZ No. 3 Field Ambulance. The New Zealand Field Ambulance No. 3 was attached to the New Zealand Rifle Brigade and served on the Western Front at Somme in 1916 and at Messines and Passchendaele in 1917. After 2½ weeks leave in England he rejoined No. 3 Field Ambulance on 20 August. On 3 September 1917 at about 9pm he suffered an injury to his right knee. While he was crossing a ploughed field to meet billets his foot fell into a hole and he dislocated a cartilage in the knee joint. It was clearly stated that he was quite sober, was performing military duty, and was not to blame. But he himself had to be admitted to the Field Ambulance.

Private L. G. Hopkins was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry and devotion to duty during the operations on October 5, 1917 at Gravenstafel. "This man repeatedly went out with his stretcher squad and searched shell holes for wounded bringing in many men. His fine example under the difficult conditions was an incentive to the other men and helped greatly in clearing the battlefield of the wounded." Five days later he was killed in action at Ypres in Belgium.

It was first reported on 13 October that he had been wounded, then missing, and finally on 20 October reported as killed in action. The Roll of Honour column of 3 November 1917 advised that

Leslie Garey Hopkins, No.3 Field Ambulance, was killed in action "somewhere in France" on October 12th. His medals – British War medal and Victory Medal - were sent to his mother, the plaque and scroll having been previously sent to his father.

Private L. G. Hopkins was reported buried first near an old German gun position, marked with peg. He is interred in the New Irish Farm Cemetery at Ypres, Belgium. He is remembered on the Timaru Memorial Wall, the Gapes Valley and Beautiful Valley War Memorial, the Geraldine War Memorial, the Memorial plaque, St Paul's Church, 25 Symonds Street, Auckland (No 3 Field Ambulance), the Commemorative Roll book at the Australian War Memorial, and the Memorial Tablet to No. 3 Ambulance in St Paul's Cathedral, Dunedin.

His brother, Harrap William Hopkins, died of disease in 1915 in Egypt. Another brother, Joseph Raymond Hopkins, also served in World War One and died at just 39 years of age. Yet another brother, Albert George Hopkins, was listed in the Reserve Roll. His only sister, Louisa, died in 1901 at Christchurch, aged 13 years.

Gold medals were to be presented by the Patriotic Committee to the next-of-kin of all soldiers of Gapes and Beautiful Valleys who fell on the field of battle, in the Gapes Valley Hall at a social afternoon tea on 8 August 1918. After the weather prevented the gathering on three occasions, the medals had to be sent.

On 17 July 1919 an impressive ceremony and one which was unique in the history of the town took place in the Timaru Drill Hall. In the company of a large assemblage of Territorials, Senior Cadets, and the general public, Sir James Allen, Acting Prime-Minister and Minister for Defence, presented twelve decorations for bravery in the field of action. He congratulated the assembly on the peace which their brave men had won, and he expressed his deep sympathy with the parents and relatives of those who would never return. Private L. G. Hopkins was one of five recipients who had been killed in action. His Military Medal was received by his mother.

At St Paul's Cathedral, Dunedin, on 22 February 1920, in a most appropriate service of hymns, prayer and sermon, a tablet to the memory of No. 3 Ambulance Corps was formally unveiled. A New Zealand battle flag which had been through the Gallipoli and French campaigns was used for the veiling. Bishop Nevill said that there were many among our people who at the outbreak of war took their stand on the side of God against the godless wrong-doing of an overweening race. Consciously or unconsciously, they chose the side of right – soldiers, sailors, ambulance men, Red Cross nurses – and very many of them laid down their lives in doing their duty to God and their country. L. G. Hopkins is one of 35 names recorded there.

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