

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

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Lance Corporal Richard Neville Hawkes, No.8/1501

By Teresa Scott

Richard Neville Hawkes was the older son of Richard Neville Nettles and Christina Janet (née Russell) Hawkes, of Timaru. Born on 7 June 1897 at Milford, Temuka, Richard was educated for 10 years at St Andrews School, South Canterbury, where his father was the headmaster. For some years prior to his appointment at St Andrews in 1899, Mr Hawkes held positions under the South Canterbury Board of Education, including at Milford and Winchester. He was very active in the South Canterbury community - engaging in debating, delivering papers (e.g. "Reminiscences of Early Times on the Goldfields of Otago" in 1893 at Rangitata), entertaining especially with his singing. He was involved in athletics, cricket, football (playing for Temuka and Waihi and refereeing school games), and fishing. He was instrumental in setting up the gun club at St Andrews and was a church warden in the Otaio and Bluecliffs parish. On retiring from teaching in 1912 on account of failing health, he moved into Timaru and worked as a produce buyer and land agent. On leaving St Andrews School he intended presenting to the school his natural history museum, which included stuffed native birds, insects, geological specimens, and curios representative of New Zealand and South Sea Islands.

In November 1914 Mr Hawkes was the spokesman for the land agents of Timaru when they met to farewell one of their number who had volunteered for the front. Little would he anticipate that his own young son was soon to leave, too. In 1916 Richard Hawkes senior was the secretary of the New Zealand Branch of the British Red Cross Society, accepting subscriptions and handling appeals. During the war he did valuable work in the Base Records Office, enlisting in February 1917 and serving with the rank of corporal. In the 1919 electoral roll he was recorded as a soldier in Wellington.

Young Richard followed in his father's football footsteps, playing for the Zingari Football Club before he left for the front. At the time of enlistment, on 11 January 1915, Richard was an indentured engineering apprentice with Wallace and Cooper. He gave his birth date as 7 March 1894, putting up his age by over three years to enable him to enlist. A fit young man, he had had experience with the Timaru senior cadets. His next-of-kin was alternatively his father and his mother.

Hawkes left Dunedin on 11 January 1915, and a month later was on his way to war, disembarking at Suez on 26 March 1915. Severely wounded on 16 May 1915 at the landing at Gallipoli, he was admitted to the Hospital Ship Braemar Castle and transferred to Lady Godleys Convalescent Home at Alexandria, where he spent four months. The bullet which hit him was not extracted, it being too near his heart. He embarked again for the Dardanelles and rejoined his unit at Lemnos. After being wounded for a second time, in September, he had recovered sufficiently by 23 October to leave for

the front. In April 1916 he embarked for France. There on 8 February 1917 he was admitted to the No 3 New Zealand Field Ambulance, the next day transferred to the No 2 Australian Casualty Clearing Station and on 13 February to the 23rd Stationary Hospital, haemorrhaging from the lung, then on 18th moved to the Convalescent Depot at Boulogne. In June he copped seven days confined to barracks and forfeiture of seven days' pay for falling out of march. In late June 1917, he was appointed temporary lance-corporal, relinquishing the position 12 days later to be appointed corporal "to complete establishment". In August he was appointed temporary corporal – the last report before his death.

Lance-corporal Robert Neville Hawkes was killed in action on 12 October 1917, on that day at Passchendaele when about 845 New Zealanders died in a failed attack. That June he had marked the third birthday celebrated in the field - turning 20.

The medals (1914-1915 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal), plaque and scroll of Lance-Corporal Richard Neville Hawkes were sent to his father. One of the hundreds whose bodies were not recovered, Richard is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. His name and that of his uncle are inscribed on his grandmother's stone in the Timaru Cemetery, over a plot where his father was also buried in 1923. He was a nephew of Samuel Gibbings Hawkes, who died of wounds on 7 November 1917 in the United Kingdom. His name is inscribed also on the Timaru Memorial Wall, St Mary's Anglican Church, Timaru and the St Andrews War Memorial.

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