

Features

GREAT WAR STORIES

Charles William Foster

Remembering the sacrifices of those with South Canterbury connections who served their country 100 years ago.

CAROL BELL

Charles William Foster was the second son of William and Ellen Matilda (Nellie Marie, née Tacon) Foster.

Born on 4 February 1894 at Timaru, he was educated at Timaru Main School, then Timaru South School and Waimataitai School as the family moved to Victoria Street in 1901 and Thomas Street in 1904.

At the time of enlisting on 31 May 1915 he was living in Wellington and working as a porter. He embarked at Wellington on 9 October 1915 destined for Egypt.

On 2 March 1916 Foster was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the Canterbury Infantry Regiment and in the May following he was appointed Lance Corporal. On 30 December 1916 from Brockenhurst he was taken on strength at the NZ Command Depot.

There in February 1917 he was transferred to the Operation Section Light Railways, ten days later to NZ Engineers, and seven days afterwards to the Canterbury Regiment and posted to C Company. After various movements at Sling

Camp, in September 1917 he was going to Rouen.

On 3 November 1917 he was to be corporal. In February 1918 he transferred from C Company to A Company. In August 1918 from hospital he proceeded overseas to Rouen. The following month he transferred to the 1st Battalion of the 3rd NZ Rifle Brigade. 11 October 1918 he rejoined his unit from the Field Ambulance and soon after was promoted to sergeant.

In December 1918 he was attached to the NZ Recept Camp and detached to the United Kingdom.

All this coming-and-going was interspersed with illness and severe wounds.

On 1 October 1916 he had gunshot wounds to abdomen and back, suffered at Le Transloy. After ten days in a dressing station he embarked on the Hospital Ship Brighton for England where he was admitted to 3rd Southern Hospital, Oxford.

Three lead balls were lodged in his stomach but an operation found only two, which were removed.

Some time later, while he was walking around the hospital, his

right leg locked up – the third ball was found in his right hip. On 6 December 1916 he was admitted to NZ General Hospital, Brockenhurst and on 29 December transferred to Base Depot at Codford.

On 5 October 1918 he was again wounded in action. 11 October 1918 he rejoined his unit.

Foster saw fighting in Egypt, going into action on Christmas Day, 1915, and in France on the Western Front, spending close to three years overseas before embarkation per the Ionic to return home on 24 April 1919 and his subsequent discharge in May 1919.

For this service he was awarded the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

His brothers Alfred George and Ernest Robert Foster, and his father William also served in World War I.

Both brothers were at the front when Charles was wounded in October 1916.

His father, of the 19th Reinforcement, was on final leave.

Like his brother Albert, Charles brought home an English bride, Lilian Rose Price whom he married on 14 April 1918 at Cowley St John, Oxford.

Charles and Lilian remained in Timaru, Charles employed as an auctioneer's storeman from about 1940. H

e was a member of the Legion of Frontiersmen.

Sergeant Charles William Fos-



The Foster family, circa 1919. Back row, from left: Ernest Robert, Ellen Evelyn (Nell, died 1920), Alfred George, Irene May, Charles William; front row, Ellen, William, and Richard John. PHOTO: COURTESY OF A BUNT.

ter died on 19 May 1965, after some years of ill health, at the age of 71 years, and was buried in the

Timaru Cemetery where a services plaque is attached to the headstone.

He was survived by his wife, three daughters and a son.

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