

Timaru Herald. Friday, June 17, 1977 (page 7) [27 June 2016]

Former S.C. drover dies in Timaru

One of South Canterbury's old time drovers who travelled hundreds of miles with stock and spent months at a time away from home, Mr Harold George Traves, died in Timaru last week. He was 92.

Before the days of rapid road transport the drover and his team of trusty dogs were the prime movers of stock between the vendor and buyer, the stockyards and the railhead.

Mr Traves covered thousands of miles over a 30 year period as a "king of the road."

Sleeping in makeshift quarters or under the stars on a long journey was all in a day's work for the hardy Mr Traves. Falling into the Ohau River and getting thoroughly drenched while trying to fill the billy was the sort of everyday hazard that Mr Traves would readily joke about.

One of his biggest drives was from the Tekapo sale to Blenheim. The Tekapo sale was, in the 1920s and 1930s one of the really big stock events of the year. The 300 mile trip took Mr Traves three months to complete.

Contemporaries of Mr Traves were the well known Tom Probyn, Tom Herbert, Bert Shaw, Charlie Creamer and Marty Wilson. They were men reputed to know every pothole and gap in a fence anywhere in South Canterbury.

Born in 1895, Mr Traves was educated at St Andrews. He left school when 10 to drive a six-horse team for his father.

DIGGER

He served in the First World War in France with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade and was severely wounded by shrapnel following a shell burst near a trench. A trench mate sitting next to him was killed outright and the jagged metal tore across Mr Traves' chest and ripped through his arms.

A damaged cigarette case in Mr Traves' battledress pocket today bears mute evidence of that ordeal.

Mr Traves was invalided out to England and returned to New Zealand to recuperate at Queen Mary Hospital at Hanmer.

Later Mr Traves took up ploughing and then turned to what was to become his main occupation – droving. Although never a sheepdog trialist Mr Traves often acted as a steward at A and P show trial events.

Mr Traves lived for many years on a small holding at Levels growing mangolds and swedes, onions and potatoes.

At one period during the depression he was forced to dump up to 12 tons of good potatoes even though he was prepared to give them away. People did not have the transport in those days to collect the potatoes.

Mr Traves enjoyed a day at the races and a good game of cards.

He is survived by his son Bill, Mr W. J. Traves, of Timaru.

[photo included; poor quality]

The Timaru Herald.

Lucky swap saved father's life

[SAHIBAN KANWAL](#)

Last updated 05:00 25/04/2014



MYTCHALL BRANSGROVE/ Fairfax NZ

LIFE-SAVING CIGARETTE CASE: A relic from the past and a life-saving cigarette case preserved by Bill Traves in his father's memory.



MYTCHALL BRANSGROVE/ Fairfax NZ

FATHER'S LEGACY: Bill Traves, 93, proudly stands with his father Harold George Traves' khaki hat and the cigarette case that saved him from a bullet in the war.

Rifleman Harold George Traves was only 22 and had been fighting for just two days when he swapped some Woodbine cigarettes for a cigarette case - a swap that was to save his life.

Traves, father of 93-year-old Timaru man Bill Traves, was part of the NZ Rifle Brigade, NO 40728 when he was wounded on August 4, 1917, around 1.30pm.

"My father was part of the 1st NZEF (New Zealand Expeditionary Force). NZEF was the title of the military forces sent from New Zealand to fight for Britain during World War I and World War II. Ultimately, the NZEF of World War I was known as the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

"He swapped some Woodbines for a cigarette case and the next day as he was standing in his trench, a shell landed alongside his trench and blew the fella next to him to bits. My father caught the shrapnel on his arm," said Traves.

He came under fire while on a stretcher and his friends were rushing him across "no man's land".

"The stretcher bearers dropped him and that is when he got caught in the fire and the case was lying in his pocket. He was lucky [the bullet hit the cigarette case], otherwise I wouldn't be here. He lived to be 82," Traves said.

His father spent six months convalescing in England and came back to Timaru near the end of the year, spending the rest of his life here.

Bill Traves joined the air force at the age of 22, just like his father. He fought in World War II and left the air force three years later as the war drew to a close.

"I retired at the end of the war - could not get home fast enough," he said.

He has memories of times past and although, according to him, most of the war was incident free, there are some things that still stick out in his mind.

"We were taking off from Nadi and just as we were about to lift off the ground, a bird decided to lighten his load on our windscreen - splat! It was everywhere," Traves said.

Bill Traves is Timaru born and bred and before he left for the war he did a joinery apprenticeship. When he came back he returned to the joinery trade.

"We stayed there for seven years and then me and a mate started off as building contractors and that's where I spent the rest of my working life."

On Anzac Day, Traves will be representing his father and his comrades-in-arms at the parade.