

Timaru Herald. 26 December 1914 (Papers Past) [26/12/2021]

THE WAR AT HOME. RETURNED VISITOR'S IMPRESSIONS.

On Thursday morning **Mr A. B. Macdougall**, who, for the past five years has been resident in Timaru, returned from a visit to his home in Lanarkshire, Scotland, and in conversation with a "Herald" reporter had several interesting observations to make on the effects of the war as seen in the Old Country. In company with another young man from Timaru, Mr F. Williams, Mr Macdougall arrived at Plymouth on the German liner "Scharnhorst" on the day war was declared between Austria and Servia. This was fortunate for them, as had they been three or four days later their ship might have altered her course for a German port, in which case the travellers would have been interned.

Everything was excitement at Home, and when the order for the mobilisation of the British troops was given, the Government took over the railways, and travellers had to put up with many inconveniences and dreary waits at wayside stations.

JOINING THE COLOURS.

In Scotland, Mr Macdougall remarked, recruiting went with a great boom, and from barracks towns trains left at a stipulated time each evening with troops of the regular army. Shortly afterwards recruits were enrolled, and all classes and types of men from town, country, and city, flocked to join the colours. They were immediately entrained and taken to training camps which were now established all over the British Isles. Those who volunteered for Home defence were sent to various ports and seaport towns, mostly on the east coast. All was now din and bustle, and the sound of regiments marching to the accompaniment of the bagpipes and instrumental music was heard on all sides.

Mr Macdougall travelled over England and Scotland extensively. He mentioned that in one day at an English city, no fewer than thirteen special trains passed through with volunteers for Kitchener's Army. At the training camps the life was a busy one for volunteers, and soldiering was entered into with enthusiasm and determination. While visiting the relatives of a Timaru friend, Mr Macdougall, from the door of where he was living, looked out on a large domain, where daily hundreds of troops in companies of about thirty, some in uniform, some without, and a commanding officer with each company, could be seen from morning till night carrying out all manner of operations and manoeuvres. In another woollen manufacturing township, a mill had been turned into a barracks, and where there was before the hum and throb of the shuttle and the loom, there is now the clash and clatter of arms.

DIGGING TRENCHES.

That officers and men are in deadly earnest was proved by the extensive practice carried on at this district in Scotland. Trench digging was going on at a great rate and was a work which was full of interest. The trenches are dug to a depth of about six feet, and the earth heaped up in front. Some spaces are cleared for keeping cartridges, and also for officers to superintend operations and give commands. It is now quite a common sight to see a regiment of soldiers thus engaged by the wayside or in paddocks along the railway lines.

THE GRIM REALITY.

The grim reality of war was forced upon them very soon — when the first of the wounded were returned Home to the hospitals or to their relatives in convalescence. The commodious infirmaries of Glasgow, as well as those of other centres, and the large country seats of the nobility, were crowded with wounded. While awaiting a train at Newcastle “in the wee sma’ ‘ours” of the morning, Mr Macdougall saw a long train of Belgian wounded come in. He was quite close to the train and thought the men a hardy, fine-looking lot. They seemed pleased to be in England, and even through the pain which was easily evident, many had smiles to give. Most of the men seemed pretty badly wounded, and in the worst cases the soldiers could not be seen, being stretched on the floors of the carriages. The idea of taking the soldiers to the hospitals at that early hour was to save them the embarrassment and annoyance of public gaze.

SQUEAL LIKE PIGS.

Mr Macdougall mentioned that he had a friend who was in the fight at Mons. This friend was wounded there and invalided home. Chatting with him on his return the wounded soldier gave a description of the battle which showed it to have been an awful one, especially for the Germans, who, he said (as the cables have often informed us) could not face the British bayonets at all. When the Germans had no option but to face the bayonets he said they did all they could to avoid punishment, and squealed for all the world like pigs. His friend admitted that he did not relish the experiences he had come through, but he recognised that this was a vital juncture in the nation’s history, sacrifices had to be made, and he was hoping he would soon be able to return and rejoin his regiment.

BELGIAN REFUGEES.

Mr Macdougall saw a large number of Belgian refugees in Glasgow during a visit there, and they presented a really pathetic spectacle. They seemed rather below the commoner class of people in the Old Country and looked really miserable. They were however, being well looked after, and seemed very thankful for the kindness they received.

THE ATROCITIES.

Asked if he had seen any of the results of the alleged German atrocities, Mr Macdougall replied in the negative, but said he was satisfied the reports were true. He had met several people in his journeyings who had seen women and children with mutilated limbs — the outcome of the Huns' ferocious instincts.

TIMARU PEOPLE HE HAD MET.

Mr Macdougall, like other travellers, found that the world is a small place after all — a conclusion he had come to on meeting several people from Timaru, in Portobello, a suburb of Edinburgh. Among these were Mr and Mrs Mayer, the former being a member of the firm of Mayer and Healey, plumbers. Mrs Mayer went Home for health reasons, but she had not improved in health at the time he saw her. He also met Mr Gibb, of the firm of Cranston and Gibb, builders of Timaru. Mr Gibb informed him that it was his intention to go from Scotland to the United States in the spring. He did not, he said, expect to find any place better than New Zealand, to which country he intended ultimately to return.

THE RETURN VOYAGE.

The return voyage Mr Macdougall, made on the Somerset, and it was a somewhat eventful one. All passengers were very closely inspected — especially regarding nationality — before joining the vessel, and Mr Macdougall remarked that he had no difficulty in convincing the officer he was not German. No friends were admitted with passengers. The ship was stopped at the mouth of the Thames at dusk, had to anchor and was ordered to put out all lights. Soon afterwards a submarine came along, made a careful search, and anchored a short distance from the liner for the night. Shortly after dawn next morning, a fleet of about thirty trawlers surrounded the ship, the order was given to "up-anchor" and accompanied by that strange escort the liner set sail for New Zealand. The trawlers kept round the ship like a clutch of chickens round a mother hen — all the way down the Straits of Dover, this being as a protection against floating mines. The wireless apparatus was not used until the English Channel was left behind, and Las Palmas was the first port of call.

GERMAN VESSEL SPOKEN.

Here the travellers had the pleasure of seeing ten German merchantmen interned. Standing guard over them was the Al..an liner Victoria, mounted with 12 guns. She had been there since the first week of the war and had to keep beyond the three mile limit — Las Palmas being a neutral port. Four days steam from Cape Town the Somerset was hailed by wireless, by a German warship. The passengers did not know the purport of the "conversation," but the liner's lights were ordered out forthwith for some nights, and the course slightly altered. Capetown was not called at and crossing the South Atlantic they had to follow a course prescribed by the Admiralty in order to keep out of the danger zone. This lengthened the journey by 150 miles.

EXPENSIVE NEWS.

It was apparently a pretty expensive business to keep in touch with the war on the boat coming out. If the passengers wanted news they were told that it would be obtained by wireless, but they would have to pay for it. This they agreed to do, and half a dozen brief messages which they got, cost them £3 10s! The passengers would have given anything for a newspaper.

The voyage across the wide expanse of ocean from South Africa to Hobart, thence to Auckland, was uneventful, and the northern port was reached on Monday last. Mr Macdougall enjoyed his trip thoroughly. One point he did not forget to emphasise was in regard to the German prisoners he saw at Home. They seemed quite happy and pleased where they were, and he thought they were far too well treated.