

# Chaplain remarks on flying bullets and shrapnel

In this fortnightly column **Carol Bell** looks at events as they were portrayed in *The Timaru Herald* locally, nationally and internationally as the world was engulfed by the Great War.

## August 25, 1914

The Rev George King was reported as having preached his farewell sermons at Pleasant Point Presbyterian Church in the morning and evening, and at Totara Valley in the afternoon before departing for the Front. Letters of well wishing were read by the elders of both churches and the ladies of the Pleasant Point PWMU presented Mr King with "a very comfortable pair of gloves". At the Totara Valley service the congregation sang "with deep feeling" God be with you till we meet again.

Chaplain Class IV (Captain) George King 9/1731 was born January 25, 1874 in Dalkeith Scotland, studied at Edinburgh University and spent two years in Queensland, where he married his wife Helen, before coming to New Zealand in 1903.

His first parish was Norsewood and he joined Pleasant Point parish April 13, 1909. Captain King joined the Chaplain Corps soon after war was declared and embarked with the Main Body on October 16, 1914 as chaplain on HMNZT No.9 "Hawkes Bay" sailing from Port Chalmers. On board was a mix of the Otago Mounted Rifles, Canterbury Mounted Rifles, two companies and machine section, Otago Infantry Battalion and NZ Field Ambulance.

King's army record is yet to become available, but he was at Gallipoli as the chaplain to the Otago and Mounted Rifles and described the fight with the Turks to his father in Scotland in an impossibly optimistic letter published in the *Dalkeith Advertiser* in May 1915. "We are still fighting the Turk, but I think it will soon be all over with him. In a short time we hope to hit him up so that his war will be finished. Then we hope that we may get to England before we go over to take a hand with the Germans. What a lot of different experiences one has in life. Here am I, at present living in a hole dug out of the hillside and feeding mostly on bully beef and hard biscuits and black tea, with the sound of rifle firing and shrapnel and big guns and the whistle of bullets never absent from my ears. We are under fire all the time here. We have no place on the ground we are holding that is out of range of rifle bullets. It is a great experience to conduct a service with shrapnel bursting over one's congregation; another to conduct funeral services with bullets zipping round the burial party. . . . Our cemetery here is

right in view of the enemy's trenches and we cannot approach it in daylight, and if we show a light at night we immediately bring down a burst of fire upon ourselves. . . . This war is more dreadful for those who remain at home than for those of us who are at the front in the trenches. There is always excitement and action with us and we just get used to the dangers, so that we think little about them. I don't think it will last very long now."

After the war George King visited South Africa and Australia, visiting schools and universities, and brought back new ideas. Subsequent church postings were to Seacliff, Dunedin 28.2.1919; Lansdowne, Masterton 3.5.1923; St James, Wanganui East 2.11.1927; Strath Taieri, Middlemarch 18.6.1937; Motueka 26.9.1940. He died in office January 30, 1944.

**Sources:** Nominal rolls; New Zealand Expeditionary Force (Europe) War Diary (1915) page xiv; <http://www.archives.....nz/Page175.htm>; <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=67601>; Christopher Pugsley Gallipoli The New Zealand Story page 232 / 379

## September 10, 1914

The Geraldine Home and Empire Relief League was hard at work, meeting once a fortnight but taking work home as well. Their first work was for the equipment and comfort of the NZ troops, but later they were engaged in making garments to be shipped to "the Mother Country" to be distributed among those in distress. Gifts of clothing were welcomed.

## September 16, 1914

The Germans were said to be in retreat in France, and discussion on Irish Home Rule was postponed for a year, or longer if the war continued. Meanwhile at home the Labour Dept reported 67 names of the unemployment books, building, carpentry, tailoring and plumbing trades all being quiet. Unions were to meet councils for discussions on possible work schemes.

■ The SC Museum, SC branch of NZ Society of Genealogists, Timaru Herald and volunteers are working on a database of SC participation in the First World War known as SCRoll. Information or memorabilia relating to this period for inclusion in the project would be welcomed. Contact Tony Rippin at the museum or Carol Bell at [carolbel@ihug.co.nz](mailto:carolbel@ihug.co.nz)