

Timaru Herald. 9 February 1915 (page 11) [03/08/2014]

DOMINION WAR NEWS.

LETTERS FROM EGYPT.

BY A TIMARU BOY.

Trooper W. W. Williams, of Timaru, writing to his people here, from Cairo, says, *inter alia*: —

Our mail has arrived and all the boys look as happy as sandboys; in every tent they are all busy writing. We are all very well and happy and getting as hard as nails. Sergt Tait got the “Timaru Herald” and it was simply decent to see it again, the last couple of days it has been simply paradise for us. Now we are settled down things are going along first rate. December 23rd. - We have been out on the march all day, the distance we covered was about 20 miles, and we never felt better than at the finish. It was a scorcher of a day and they set us a hot pace with only three spells for the distance; it took two hours for the Australasian troops to pass the saluting point in the centre of Cairo, we were then marched through old Cairo, just to show the natives the strength of the Colonial forces. This part of the town is practically in ruins, and the sights we saw there were awful. The amount of disease, and sores covering half the face, were a sickening sight, whilst the filth and stink in the narrow streets is enough to make the strongest want to heave. However, we enjoyed the whole march and en route got a very good hearing. To-night our tent is full of the Lancashire boys, who often visit us. To-night Colonel Thomas received a cablegram from Mrs Guinness wishing us Christmas greetings from all our families in Timaru; he sent one from the ambulance boys of Timaru the previous evening. I intended sending one to you at home, but thought it rather expensive, and the Colonel assured us that his cable would appear in both of the Timaru papers. We had a grand Christmas dinner. Our sergeants and sergeant-majors acted as waiters, one to each tent, and they treated us right royally; they also had in take orders from the private with the big crime sheet. This chap is a very hard case and when he was holding an inspection of all our officers he “told than off” just as they do us. After dinner we all paraded and paid the officers our best respects and sang and cheered them until we were hoarse. The Colonel spoke very nice to us in return. I hope you have spent as happy a Christmas as we have. Last night all the New Zealanders that volunteered in England arrived here and were on parade at church this morning; they are like us, a very much smarter looking lot than the Home boys encamped here. The High Commissioner for New Zealand also came out with them and attended the service; but he returns as soon as he fixes up with General Godley about our pay, rations, equipment, etc. They feel the heat here pretty much after coming from England. At the pyramids yesterday one of the Lancashire artillery men fell from halfway up the

big pyramid and was killed outright. There have been several killed when ascending the outside. This morning two of the Army Service Corps, who are attached to us as transport drivers, were arrested for assaulting a native in Heliopolis, they must have given him a rough time as it is doubtful if he will live; if he lives they will get off and even if he dies they will probably only get fined a pound or so, and from two to four months close confinement; so you can see how cheaply they hold a native's life here.

Timaru Herald. 21 June 1915 (page 4) [03/05/2016]

LETTERS FROM OUR BOYS A FINE SPIRIT.

LETTER FROM TROOPER WILLIAMS.

Trooper Williams, son of Mr Williams, of the firm of H. Allchurch and Co., auctioneers. Cain's Terrace, Timaru. writes the following very interesting letter to his parents from Cairo: -

“Our boys made their landing at the Dardanelles all right, and got it hot if all reports are true. We know nothing officially, and I have no doubt that you will get much more news of the fighting in the New Zealand papers than we will get here. We have, however, every reason to believe that though the casualties were heavy they were much lighter than was expected, and that the progress made exceeded all expectations. We have also heard that the Canterbury infantry regiments were badly cut up, and that both Major Grant (of Timaru), and Colonel Stewart have been killed. Several ambulance trains have already arrived here with mostly Australian wounded, who have been sent to the various military hospitals in Cairo. From what, the wounded say, the bulk of the casualties occurred in making the landing, the Maxim fire of the Turks being both accurate and deadly. Both men and officers of the Australasians went, they say, absolutely mad, and their bayonet work was splendid and not appreciated by the Turks. When the news of the fighting reaches New Zealand it should stimulate recruiting, which, from what we have heard has not been too brisk there lately, though they will all be wanted. Certainly for so young a country New Zealand has done splendidly, but in proportion to England's population the percentage has been small. We all think it will be a long and a hard fight before Constantinople falls, and it looks as if it will be some little time before the mounted troops are wanted to keep the Turks on the run, but we all hope to be

there when the Turkish capital falls. This morning a memorial service was held in camp to those who fell in the Dardanelles' actions. I suppose they will be doing likewise all over Australasia today. It will be both a sad and a proud time for you all there. I had a day in hospital last week from a touch of the sun, but am well and fit again. At present the troops in camp are going in for cricket. To-day our corps are playing Wellington Mounted Rifles, and are 14 runs behind on the first innings. The colonel, major, and two of the captains are our "big guns."

"One of my tent mates has just come in from the Palace Hotel at Heliopolis (Australian base hospital) and has seen some of the wounded, and had short conversations with some of them. They all say it was simply hell on earth when landing. There were barbed wire entanglements, both in and out of the water, earth pits with spikes in the bottoms, etc., while the enemy occupied concealed positions on the top of a steep hill on the faces of which were more entanglements and pits, but the Australasians simply wanted that hill, and made rush after rush and eventually got it, though at a very heavy cost. Concealed sharpshooters were much in evidence picking off officers, and they think a very big proportion of officers were killed. At this one hospital alone they have operated on over 600 already, the operating theatre being kept going day and night with relays of doctors and nurses. That is only minutes' walk from where I am writing this. The military officials have commandeered many places for hospitals, and these are filled with those suffering from minor wounds, the most serious cases being left at Alexandria.

"May 5th — This will be my last letter from this camp as to-day orders came through that we leave here for the Dardanelles on Saturday or Sunday next, and we are truly thankful that our chance has come. We there and then set to work overhauling and preparing our kits. We know and realise what we have got to face, but each and all of us are determined that we will face it as our infantry have already done.

"The wounded in the hospitals bring us tales of fearful atrocities perpetrated on their wounded comrades, many of those in hospital only escaping by feigning death 'till all was quiet, and then getting away as best they could to a place of safety. This afternoon my chum and I were speaking to Bob Smith, a Timaru boy, in the South Canterbury's. He was wounded in the shoulder a few hours after landing, but is now practically recovered. He said they lost fairly heavily, especially in killed, but the Auckland regiment seem to have been very badly cut up. Some English regulars, who were in the retreat from Mons etc., and who were sent out for the Dardanelles' operations, say that it was a picnic to the Dardanelles' fighting. They were on landing sent to hold a position for twelve hours, and this they did for 23 hours, when a French regiment came to relieve them. The regulars speak in great terms of the Australian and New Zealand troops as fighting men, and say they fought like demons.

“The mounted rifles are all going dismounted, though we take all our transport teams and officers’ horses — about 80 in all. To-night practically all the boys are writing as only the two nights remain to get our correspondence squared up, and as the mail is in and brought me 11 letters and five newspapers, I shall have to wire in. After three weeks waiting, home letters were very welcome indeed.

“Do not be surprised if you do not hear from me for some little time, as we shall not have much time for writing I expect. I am very well and fit, and feel equal to the task we shall have to face in few days’ time. If the worst should happen to me I am sure you will not grieve unnecessarily, but be thankful that the family was well represented, and that one gave his life for the cause that I know if you were able you would willingly give yours for. Now do not worry, but try to be patient and cheerful ‘till again you hear from me.”

New Zealand Herald. 25 June 1915 [29/05/2017]

UNDER TERRIFIC FIRE.

SPLENDID BAYONET WORK.

HARD FIGHTING AHEAD.

Interesting details of the Gaba Tepe fight are contained in a letter from Trooper Williams, of Timaru, written to his father from Cairo. “Several ambulance trains have already arrived here, mostly with Australian wounded, who have been sent to the various military hospitals in Cairo,” says the writer. “From what the wounded say, the bulk of the casualties occurred in making the landing, the Maxim fire of the Turks being both accurate and deadly. They state that both men and officers of the Australasians went absolutely mad, and their bayonet work was splendid and not appreciated by the Turks. When the news of the fighting reaches New Zealand it should stimulate recruiting. We all think it will be a long and a hard fight before Constantinople falls, and it looks as if it will be some little time before the mounted troops are wanted to keep the Turks on the run, but we all hope to be there when the Turkish capital falls.

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rush after rush, and eventually got it, though at a very heavy cost. Concealed sharpshooters were much in evidence, picking off officers, and they think a very big proportion of officers was killed. At this one hospital alone they have operated on over 600 already, the operating theatre being kept going day and night with relays of doctors and nurses. That is only 25 minutes' walk from where I am writing this. The military officials have commandeered many places for hospitals, and these are filled with those suffering from minor wounds, the most serious cases being left at Alexandria.

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Alexandra Herald and Central Otago Gazette. 4 August 1915 [29/05/2017]

THE WAR.

LETTER FROM THE TRONT

The following is an extract from a letter written to his father, Mr F. Williams of Timaru by Trooper Williams an old Alexandra boy. The concluding sentence of this excellent letter is as fine an exposition of the splendid spirit of our colonial boys, as we have yet seen:

“Our boys made their landing at the Dardanelles all right, and got it hot if all reports are true. We know nothing and I have no doubt that you will get much more news of the fighting in the New Zealand papers than we will get here. We have, however, every reason to believe that though the casualties were heavy they were much lighter than was expected, and that the progress made exceeded all expectations. We have also heard that the Canterbury infantry regiments were badly cut up, and that both Major Grant (of Timaru), and Colonel Stewart have been killed. Several ambulance trains have already arrived here with mostly Australian wounded, who have been sent to the various military hospitals in Cairo. From what the wounded say, the bulk of the casualties occurred in making the landing, the Maxim fire of the Turks being both accurate and deadly. Both men and officers of the Australasians went, they say, absolutely mad, and their bayonet work was splendid and not appreciated by the

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Timaru Herald. 16 August 1915 (page 9) [03/05/2016]

SOLDIERS' LETTERS

THE WILLIAMS BROTHERS.

Private Williams, of the mounted field ambulance, writing on June 9th to his parents, of Jackson Street, Timaru, says: — Just a card to say all is well with us. We are again shifting to-day, where to we don't know. I have had no mail since three days prior to leaving Egypt. We get no writing materials; and have little time for writing letters. We have seen great sights, and have travelled about a great deal since we left Egypt. My health has never been better, and you have no cause to worry about me. For the past week we have been aboard a Cunard liner bringing 1500 wounded; and have had great quarters and meals, but now we have again touched civilisation we have to leave her, may be to go on shore, may be to return to where we came from.

Malta, June 12th. — We arrived here on the 9th, and will have to move on again any day. We are continually on the move, and have never yet been stationary at any one place for more than a few days at a time, and a few days in a civilised place is very welcome to us. So far we have not been in action, but have witnessed heavy bombardments, and have had the enemy's rifle fire landing around us. There is very little I can tell you on account of the censorship. Malta

is the cleanest and prettiest town I've ever been in, and things in general are cheap, and up-to-date. The whole place has an air of prosperity about it. Everybody is well dressed, and it would be a hard job to find a girl who is not only well dressed but also good looking. Yesterday when up town we met a detachment of New Zealand nurses passing through to - - -, where they are going for duty; there were no Christchurch or Timaru nurses among them. They gave us all their latest Home news. We are in barracks here, and are being well done by, but at night the fleas bite blazes out of us.

June 15th. — More wounded arrived here yesterday — a few New Zealanders among them.

H.M.T. Massilia, Alexandra, June 21st. — Must write this on a succession of cards as it is impossible to obtain any paper aboard, and we can get absolutely no leave to go ashore. We left Malta on Tuesday, and arrived here two days ago, and to-morrow we leave again for the Dardanelles, though it is improbable that we shall land there. We were landed there three weeks ago, but were packed back again straight away, as they have at present all the ambulance they require. All told we have been at the Dardanelles four times. Our past duty has been taking on and attending wounded aboard various boats, and cruising round various small islands in the Dardanelles region. On one occasion we had a rather narrow escape from a high explosive shell supposed to have been fired by the Goeben. Yesterday we received our first mail for over two months - fortunately a late one dated May 10th and 12th. I got eight letters: it's like fresh life to hear from you all again. Aboard this boat we have had a pretty rough time as far as food and quarters go, and our complaints have been the means of getting the acting-chief steward into very hot water. The Maoris made a big demonstration, and were quietened by the promise of decent meals, but today's are no better. Our own officers are in no way to blame, and it is only out of respect to them that we are not causing trouble. There is no cause for such treatment; if there was we would cheerfully take what was given to us. One of our officers said the other day: "A pig would turn up its nose at the tucker you boys are getting", but 'nuf said. We are all fit and well, and suffering from nothing worse than empty stomachs.

Mr Williams has also received a short letter from another son, written from the North Sea, where he is on one of H.M.S. patrol boats. After being twice turned down by military examiners in the North Island, for dental reasons, he worked his passage Home, and joined the Royal Navy. A considerable portion of the letter is "censored out," but he says he is well and fit, and happy to be doing his bit. He speaks of two previous letters, written seemingly when training ashore, but which probably the censor has detained as they have not come to hand.

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Continued.