



# Discover WW1

## *What is in a Personnel file?*

### **The History Sheet**

The History Sheets were the central document to be retained on virtually every file. They capture a summary of all of the basic details of service and the key pieces of information most commonly referred to by the army's administrative staff. The History Sheet brought together a broad range of information in one document, including all the usual personal information together with summaries of their length and location of service, as well as wound and illnesses suffered.

**HISTORY-SHEET.**

Rank: *Private*      Surname: *James*      Christian Name: *James*      No.:

Occupation: *Farmst*      Last New Zealand address: *P.O. HALDANE*

Last employer: *Self*      Religion: *Angl*      Date of Birth: *16.12.95*

Name, relationship, and address of next-of-kin (if not resident in New Zealand, insert also name and address of nearest relative in New Zealand):  
*Wife Louisa Wybroe (Mother)*  
*Post Office*  
*HALDANE*  
*SOUTHLAND*

Country or Troopship	Date from	Date to	Total	Initials of Officer making Entry	Days Service
<i>N.Z.</i>	<i>19.2.17</i>	<i>30.12.18</i>			
<i>Embarked</i>	<i>1.5.18</i>	<i>4.10</i>	<i>267</i>		
<i>Discharged</i>	<i>26.1.19</i>	<i>2.12</i>			
					<i>267</i>

Wounds: *None*

Sick: *None*

Decorations: *None*

Discharge: *19.12.1918*

Pension: *B.N. 125 RECEIVED 12.6.19*

**MEDICAL ACTION COMPLETE**

Signature: *James S. Wybroe*

- The person's unit, rank and service number
- Their name, occupation, last employer, last address, religion and date of birth
- The name and address of the next of kin, including the nature of their relationship
- The dates of service in New Zealand and overseas, including the date of embarkation for foreign-service and the troop ship
- Summaries of wounds and illness suffered during service, including dates of hospitalisation, recovery and reassignment.
- Notations on casualty status if applicable; Killed in action, died of wounds, missing or prisoner of war
- Date of discharge and any pension entitlements
- A statement of service; documenting promotions, transfers, demotions, wounds and any misconduct
- The details of a person's marriage and or children

One important feature to note regarding these documents is that they will often have two small slips of paper glued to the front of the document. When these documents were scanned at least three separate copies of the front page were made. The first with both of these papers left in place and then the two subsequent copies were made with each of the notes being folded back to reveal what was recorded underneath. You can be assured that everything which could be copied was copied. These slips were later additions which were used to help the army keep track of a person's medal entitlements.

25-7-68

Service: 267

Wounds ...

No. 47295 Rank: Rfm.

Name: JAMES WYBROW

Address: Maitland, 20 St. Andrew St. Auckland

Periods of Service:

In New Zealand	1 year 193 days
Oceania	years 267 days
Total service	2 years 95 days

Theatres of Operation:

Australia	
Egyptian	
Egyptian E.F.	
Greece	
Western European	
Asiatic	

Date commenced duty: 19.2.17

Date finally discharged: 24.5.19

Decorations: British War Medal

The foregoing particulars are correct.

Signature: James Wybrow

N.B. - Do not omit to advise this office of any future change of address.

24.5.1919

- The relevant theatres of service (Egyptian and Western European were most common but sometimes you can sometimes find the Dardanelles pencilled in to represent the Gallipoli campaign)
- Service Medal entitlements; British War Medal and Victory Medal
- Medal Action Complete: a dated stamp indicating that the medals had been issued

Although these slips do provide a good indication of what a person's medal entitlements were, anyone with queries relating to medals should contact the Defence Force's Medals Office as they can provide the definitive answer.

## Attestation Form

The attestation forms used during World War I were similar to, but far more detailed than, those used for the South African War. They served the same purpose but the World War I forms in some ways reflected the greater scale of the conflict and the greater need for administrative conformity. The additional information found on the attestation form included;

Form of attestation of voluntary recruits and of men called up for service under the Military Service Act, 1916, who are willing to be attested in this manner.

**NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE**  
ATTESTATION FOR GENERAL SERVICE.

QUESTIONS TO BE PUT TO THE RECRUIT.

1. What is your name? ... *James Hybrow*

2. Where were you born? ... *New Zealand*

3. Are you a British subject? ...

4. What is the date of your birth? ... *16<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1894*

5. What are the names of your parents? ...  
 Father: *James*  
 Mother: *Louisa*

6. Where were your parents born? ...  
 Father: *New Zealand*  
 Mother: *New Zealand*

7. If your parents are of alien origin, when and where were they naturalized? ...  
 Father: (when) ... (where) ...  
 Mother: (when) ... (where) ...

8. How long have you been resident in New Zealand? ... *Born in N.Z.*

9. How long have your parents been resident in New Zealand? ...  
 Father: *Born in N.Z.*  
 Mother: *Born in N.Z.*

10. What is your trade or calling? ... *Farmer*

11. Are you an indentured apprentice? If so, where, and to whom? ... *no*

12. What was the address at which you last resided? ... *Halden P. Office*

13. Have you passed the Fourth Educational Standard or its equivalent? ... *yes*

14. What is the name and address of your present or last employer? ... *Own employer*

15. Are you single, married, widower, divorced, or legally separated from your wife? ... *single*

16. If married, a widower, divorced, or legally separated from your wife, how many children under sixteen years of age have you? ... *1*

17. If single, how many persons are absolutely dependent on you? ... *none*

18. Have you ever been sentenced to imprisonment by the Civil power? If so, when and where? ... *no*

19. Do you now belong to any Military or Naval Force? If so, to what corps? ... *no*

20. Have you ever served in any Military or Naval Force? If so, state which and cause of discharge. ... *no*

21. Have you truly stated the whole (if any) of your previous service? ... *yes*

22. Have you ever been medically examined for service with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force? If so, when and where? ... *no*

23. Have you been registered for compulsory military training under the Defence Act, 1909? If so, where? ... *yes Halden*

24. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for the Military or Naval Forces of the Crown? If so, on what grounds? ... *no*

25. Are you willing to be vaccinated or revaccinated and inoculated? ... *yes*

26. Are you willing to serve in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in or beyond the Dominion of New Zealand for the duration of the present war with Germany and six months thereafter, if your service is so long required? ... *yes*

27. For which Reinforcement draft do you volunteer? ... *1*

*James Hybrow*, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagement made.

Signature of Recruit: *James Hybrow*  
 Signature of Witness: *Robert Brown*

Oath to be taken by Recruit on attestation.

I, *James Hybrow*, do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to our Sovereign Lord the King, and that I will faithfully serve in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force against His Majesty's enemies, and that I will loyally observe and obey all orders of the Generals and Officers set over me, until I shall be lawfully discharged. So help me, God.

Certificate of Attesting Officer.

The above questions were read to the above-named recruit in my presence. I have taken care that he understands these questions, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered. The said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath of allegiance before me, at *Home*, N.Z., on this *thirtieth* day of *January*, 1917.

Signature of Attesting Officer: *W. A. O.*

NOTE 1.—If any alteration is required on this page of the attestation, the Attesting Officer should be requested to make it and initial the alteration.

NOTE 2.—The recruit expresses his preference to enlist for *General* (Branch of service.)

- The names and the place of birth for the person's parents
- If the parents were 'aliens', were they naturalised and how long had they been resident in the country
- Did the person reach a 4<sup>th</sup> form standard of education and were they an apprentice?
- Their marital status and whether they had any dependants
- Did they have a criminal record?
- Did they have any former military experience, if so what?
- Have they been previously rejected as unfit for military service, if so why?
- Have they received vaccinations or been inoculated?
- Do they agree to serve in New Zealand or overseas for the duration of the war with Germany, and up to 6 months beyond?
- The person's signature on the oath of service with signatures from a witness and the attesting officer or magistrate

On the reverse of the attestation form was a physical description of the person and a summary of the medical examination which was nearly identical to the one used for South African War.

## Casualty Form – Active Service

The Casualty Forms are another key document although their title is somewhat misleading. Although the forms do record information regarding any wounds, fatal or otherwise, suffered by the subject of the file, they also capture a much broader spread of information.

Essentially these documents recorded any changes in a person's circumstances. These forms document a person's promotions, transfers, demotions, wounds and general movements. They link these to a specific time and location.

- The Date and origins of the reported information (This is purely administrative and has little bearing on the actual instance being reported)
- The nature of the event, often the movement from one base camp to another, the appointment to a new unit or a new rank, an admittance to hospital for illness or the suffering of a wound, or the date of embarkation onto and disembarkation off from a troop ship
- The place of the event
- The date of the event
- General remarks, this often referenced the source of the information or added some details. In some instances the nature of an illness or wound may be detailed

More than any other document the Casualty Form often requires a great deal of interpretation. The document has a heavy dependence on the use of abbreviations, often representing common military short hand for unit types, ranks or actions. Although a number of sources provides helpful list of the most common military terms and abbreviations, unfortunately some remain a mystery.

A commonly used notation which, although clear in its meaning, is particularly frustrating for many researchers, is the phrase 'in the field' used to denote a location. This simply meant that the person was on active service with their unit. It does not indicate the actual place or hint at the battle where the event, such as suffering a wound, might have taken place. Such details need to be sought elsewhere.

Finally it does need to be noted that as the document only records changes, there can be long periods of time where there were no updates. It does not mean nothing was happening to that person it just means that there were no new circumstances to record.

As difficult as these documents can be to understand and decipher they can provide closest thing we have to an account of what the person experienced during their service.

## Medical History and the Proceedings of the Medical Boards

The medical status of the person was of great interest to the Army and most files include some kind of documentation assessing the fitness or physical condition of a service person. Medical History sheets documented the physical assessment carried out at the time of enlistment, and to provide a classification of fitness. Class A meaning fully fit for service.

Where a person later experienced physical distress, illness or suffered a wound that could affect their fitness for further military service, a Medical Examination or Medical Board would often be called. The documentation produced by Medical Board Proceedings or Medical Examinations tended to focus on what was commonly referred to as the 'disability'. Although the format of the paper could change, the report or proceedings would record what the cause of the 'disability' was, what its current effects on the person were and what the long term effect was likely to be.

W. NE/MC

ABBREVIATED MEDICAL BOARD ON NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND MEN N.Z.E.F.

Station: Canterbury Depot

1. Unit: Reg. N.Z.A.B.      2. Age last birthday: 25

3. Enlistment No.: 4749      4. Enlisted on: 4.2.19

4. Rank: Private      5. Former trade or occupation: Tramway

6. Name: WYB. RDW      7. Former trade or occupation: Tramway

8. Disability: Shelly full influenza      9. Place and date of origin of disability: Oct. 1918 - Basatin

10. Essential facts in the history of the disability: Went onto Camp No 6 1918. In some service for 12 months. Suffered from flu for 2 weeks. After - could not stand the training. 10/1/18. From which he Shelly full influenza.

11. Cessation of the disability: Infection

12. Present condition of the patient: Complains of pain in precordial region - in chest of breast - Chest no weight. Some hyperaesthesia just below the nipple - A.B. inside N.B. sounds clear. RR 20. Chest - pain in L. side on taking deep breath. No P.S. Change cough.

13. Recommendation of the Medical Officer: B.3 (Sig.) D. C. Law Lt. N.Z.A.C.

OPINION OF THE MEDICAL BOARD

14. (a) State whether disability result of (1) active service, (2) climate, or (3) ordinary military service. No

(b) If due to one of these causes, to what specific conditions do the Board attribute it? Constitutional

(c) Is the disability constitutional or hereditary? Constitutional

15. Note if aggravated by intemperance, misconduct, or the conditions mentioned in Section 14 (a). Aggravation on A.C.

16. Is the disability permanent? If not, state probable minimum duration: No. 2 mos.

17. State the degree of disablement at which, in the Board's opinion, he should be assessed for pension purposes at present. By less than 20%

18. Recommendation of the Board: B.3      (Sig.) [Signature]      (Sig.) [Signature]

Station: Canterbury Depot      Date: 11.1.19

APPROVED. [Signature]      (Sig.) [Signature]

Administrative Medical Officer.

- Was the 'disability' caused by active service, climate or ordinary military service?
- Were there any hereditary or constitutional influences?
- Was 'disability' was the result of 'intemperance or misconduct'?
- Was the 'disability' permanent?
- What was the degree of disablement (something which was expressed as a percentage)?

The results of these reports and proceedings generally determine whether the person would be able to eventually return to active or partial service, would require further treatment or would be discharged from the Armed Forces.

## Certificate of Discharge

Most files maintained a copy of the document formalising the end of a person's military service. The standard document on file usually confirmed that the person had been discharged, either on the termination of their period of engagement, or due to no longer being fit for service.

1. 8. 18. 24. 4. 19. (B. S. Form No. 207.)  
No. 47479  
NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. 6. 6. 19 1918  
CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE.  
No. 47295 Rank Rifleman 763 Rifle Brigade  
Name James W. Brown  
is discharged on the termination of his period of engagement.  
Service abroad \_\_\_\_\_ years 267 days  
DESCRIPTION OF SOLDIER ON ENLISTMENT.  
Age 22 1/2 years Height 5 feet 5 1/2 inches  
Complexion Brown Eyes Brown  
Hair Dark Brown Trade or occupation Farmer  
PACKED FOR DISCHARGE NOTICE  
Date 24. 5. 19. Signature: [Signature]  
Wellington, 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1919. For Major General, Commanding New Zealand Military Forces.

- The person's including name, rank and unit
- Their age and description at enlistment
- The date and place where they enlisted
- The length of service both in New Zealand and overseas
- The date and place of discharge
- In some instances a certificate of character was issued, including a note on decorations awarded

## Notification of Death

In many cases the final document added to a service file would come well after the person's discharge. On the death of a veteran it was not uncommon for a military plaque or inscription to be requested to mark their grave. In these cases the Department of Internal Affairs would forward a death notice to the Army's Base Records to confirm the details and identity of the veteran. The notice would also duly record the place and date of death as well as the person's current next of kin and their address.

# What is a Duplicate Personnel file?

## Duplicate Personnel Records

In some cases World War I veterans had two personnel files, a standard file and another described as a duplicate. The description 'duplicate personnel file' is somewhat misleading. These are really parallel files which were created by the army to supplement the standard service file. To capture the documentation required to manage a person's rehabilitation and entitlements to military pensions or benefits. There was some cross over between the standard file and what was referred to the duplicate, but it isn't a straight substitution. Not all of the service documentation found on the standard service file is on the duplicate, likewise not all of the papers on the duplicate can be found on the standard file.

Given the purpose of the duplicate file it is not surprising that the information it captures often relates to the ongoing medical effects of a person's military service. The medical history and physical condition of those who required extended hospitalisation or who returned to civilian life with some degree of impairment were often described in great detail within these files. These records can sometimes extend well beyond the period of a person's military service to capture their, often difficult, experience of post-war rehabilitation.

# Where can I get more information?

## **Abbreviation Guide**

A guide to the terms used in the file can be found here:

<http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/personnel-records/nzdf-archives/resources/ww1-army-service-records.htm>

## **Official Regimental Histories**

You can often get more contextual information (battles, locations) from the official regimental histories, which have been digitised and are available online here:

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-WH1.html>

## **Casualty Forms – Active Service Registers**

If the person died during service then Archives New Zealand may hold further information in the Casualty Forms – Active Service Registers. These are similar to forms in the personnel file but often contain extra death or burial information.

They are organised by surname, but there are often gaps. The listings can be found here:

<http://archway.archives.govt.nz/ViewRelatedEntities.do?code=519&relatedEntity=Item>

## **Official Unit Diaries**

We also hold the official Unit Diaries for most units, which give extra context of particular engagements. However they do not often mention the rank and file by name, so hold little biographical information. More information here:

<http://archway.archives.govt.nz/ViewEntity.do?code=ACID>

## **War Art Online**

Archives New Zealand has digitised the National Collection of War Art. This collection is composed of about 1,500 original artworks depicting those who served New Zealand in times of war, and the arenas in which they served. You can search, download and re-use images here:

<http://warart.archives.govt.nz/>

## **Researching New Zealand soldiers**

This nzhistory.net.nz page has guidance about researching WW1 soldiers, including links to the Auckland War Memorial database 'Cenotaph' and other useful websites:

<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/researching-first-world-war-soldiers>

## **Archives New Zealand**

[www.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archives.govt.nz)

[www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz)

[research.archives@dia.govt.nz](mailto:research.archives@dia.govt.nz)