

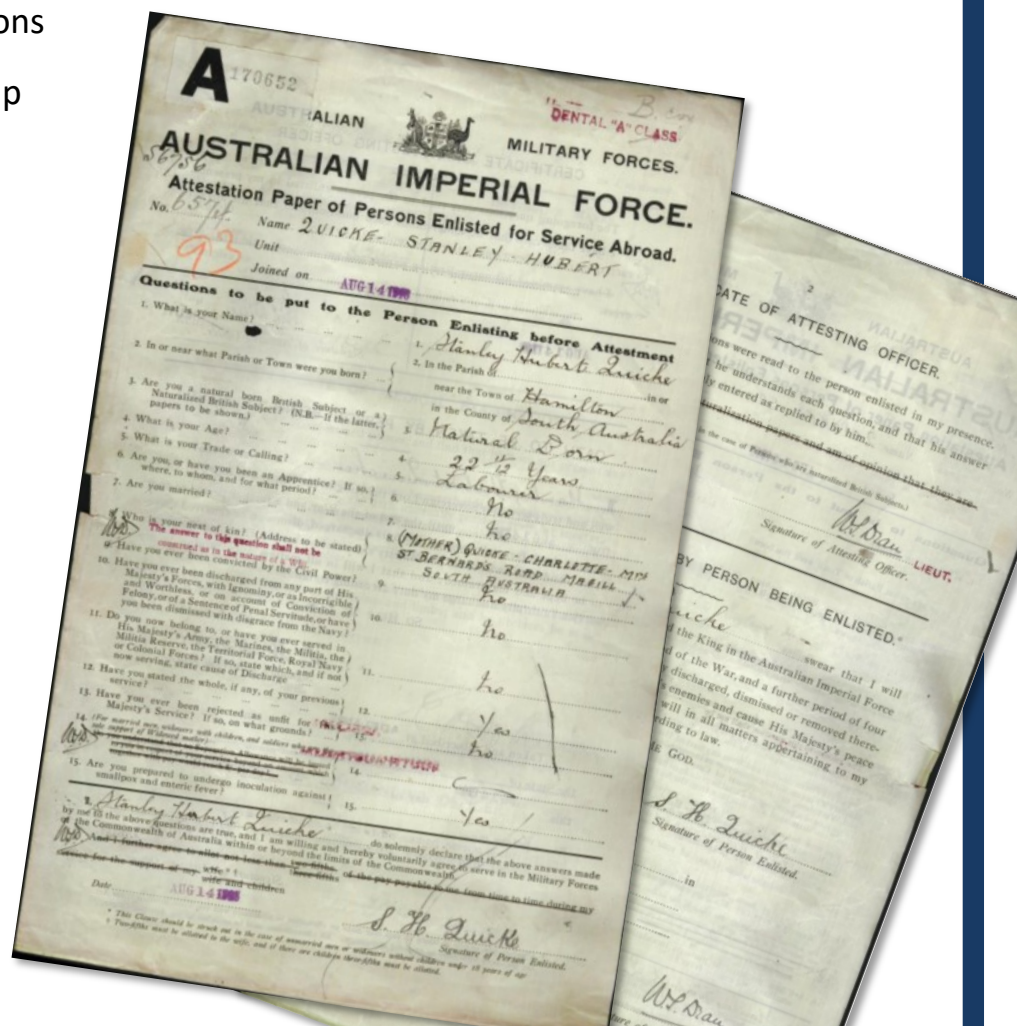
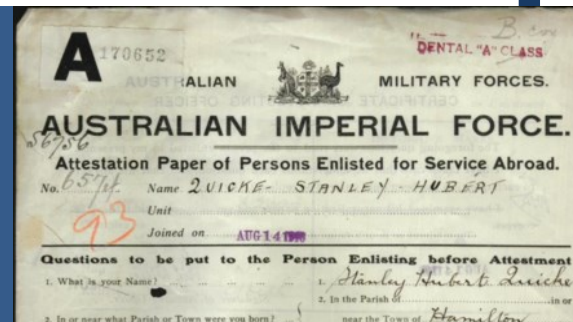
# GUIDE TO READING SERVICE RECORDS

## First World War (1914—1918)

Service Records often hold the key to understanding the experiences of men and women before, during and after conflict. But they are not always easy sources to read.

This guide will help you to understand Australian service records from the First World War. It contains:

- I. Parts of AIF Service Records
- II. Reading old handwriting
- III. Keywords and abbreviations
- IV. Where to go for more help

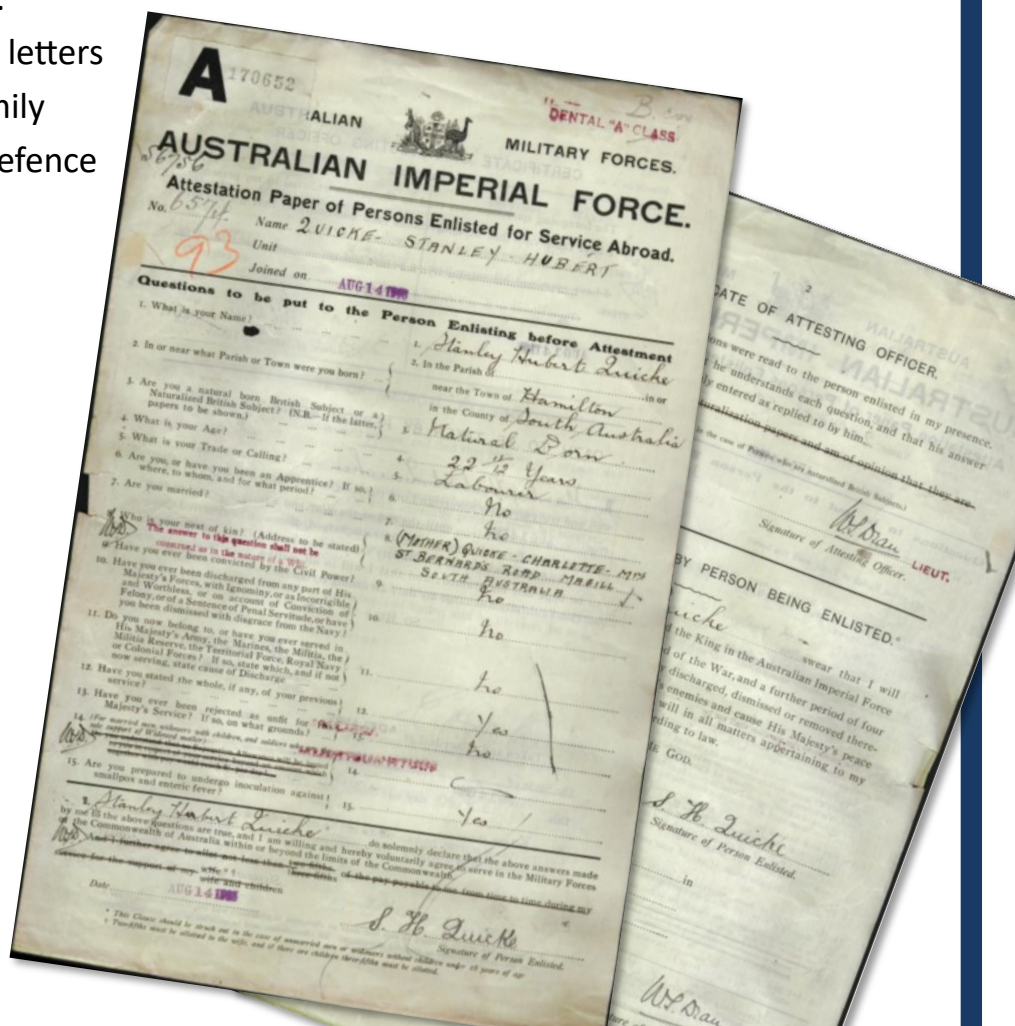


# PARTS OF AIF RECORDS

## Parts of AIF Service Records

Service Records normally contain three groups of documents:

1. **Attestation Paper.** This was completed by the person on enlistment and normally gives address, next of kin, age and place of birth.
2. **Casualty Form—Active Service.** This form is mostly about the person's presence or absence from their unit. It shows movements, transfers between units, absences through wounds or illness, promotions and decorations.
3. **Military correspondence.** Usually after the war, any letters between the soldier's family and the Department of Defence were kept on file.





# PARTS OF AIF RECORDS



The **Attestation Paper** is usually the first page of a First World War service record. It was completed by the person enlisting and contains a lot of background information including the place of birth, age (in years and months), their occupation at the time of enlistment and, often, the details of the next of kin.

At the bottom of the page, you will find the date of enlistment along with the signature of the person enlisting. If it is readable, you can use this signature to check the spelling of the last name (it might be different from the name at the top of the page). See this video for more: [youtu.be/K2e6l3YqAOo](https://youtu.be/K2e6l3YqAOo)

**A 170652**  
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.  
**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**  
Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.  
No. 6574 Name QUICKE STANLEY HUBERT  
Unit 93  
Joined on AUG 14 1916

**Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestment**

1. What is your Name? Stanley Hubert Quicke
2. In the Parish of Hamilton in or near the Town of Hamilton in the County of South Australia
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.) Natural Born
4. What is your Age? 22 1/2 Years
5. What is your Trade or Calling? Labourer
6. Are you, or have you been an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period? No
7. Are you married? No
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated) (MOTHER) QUICKE CHARLOTTE MARY ST BERNARDS ROAD MARILL SOUTH AUSTRALIA
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? No
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with ignominy, or as incorrigible and worthless, or on account of Conviction of Felony, or of a Sentence of Penal Servitude, or have you been dismissed with disgrace from the Navy? No
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of Discharge No
12. Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? Yes
13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? No
14. (For married men, widowers with children, and soldiers who are support of widowed mothers) Are you in receipt of your pension based on an award made by the War Office? No
15. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against smallpox and enteric fever? Yes

I, Stanley Hubert Quicke, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to allow not less than two-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during my absence for the support of my wife and three-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during my absence for the support of my children.

Date AUG 14 1916 S. H. Quicke  
Signature of Person Enlisted.

Place of Birth

Occupation

The address of the closest relative is also often the hometown.

This is the date Stanley Quicke signed the Attestation Paper (14 August 1916) —but it is not necessarily the date of enlistment. That is when he took the oath, on the following page.

# PARTS OF AIF RECORDS



The Attestation Paper contains a physical description and the certificate of medical examination, which the Examining Medical Officer signs to say the person is fit to serve in the Australian Imperial Force.

This form will also show you the unit into which the serviceman or servicewoman first enlisted. This will not necessarily be the unit in which they spent most of the war.

In the First World War, servicemen were not asked for their date of birth, but only for their age at the time of enlistment.

**For example:** On 18 October 1916, Stanley Quicke said he was 22 years and 11 months old. That would make him born sometime in November, 1893.

3

Description of *Stanley Hubert Quicke* on Enlistment

Age <i>22</i> years <i>11</i> months	DISTINCTIVE MARKS. <i>V. 10. R 4/6 L 4/6</i> <i>Vacc 4 L.</i>
Height <i>6</i> feet <i>1 1/2</i> inches	
Weight <i>180</i> lbs.	
Chest Measurement <i>34 3/4</i> inches	
Complexion <i>Fresh</i>	
Eyes <i>Blue</i>	
Hair <i>Light Brown</i>	
Religious Denomination <i>Meth.</i>	

**CERTIFICATE OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION.**

I HAVE examined the above-named person, and find that he does not present any of the following conditions, viz:—

Scrofula; phthisis; syphilis; impaired constitution; defective intelligence; defects of vision, voice, or hearing; hernia; hæmorrhoids; varicose veins, beyond a limited extent; marked varicocele with unusually pendent testicle; inveterate cutaneous disease; chronic ulcers; traces of corporal punishment, or evidence of having been marked with the letters D. or B.C.; contracted or deformed chest; abnormal curvature of spine; or any other disease or physical defect calculated to unfit him for the duties of a soldier.

He can see the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs; and he declares he is not subject to fits of any description.

I consider him fit for active service.

Date *31 JUL 1916*

Place *ADELAIDE.*

Signature of Examining Medical Officer. *E. J. Johnson*

**CERTIFICATE OF COMMANDING OFFICER.**

I CERTIFY that this Attestation of the above-named person is correct, and that the required forms have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to *2/10th Rein.*

Date *18.10.1916*

Place *Melbourn*

Signature of Commanding Officer. *W. Macdonald*

This is the unit to which the serviceman or servicewoman is first sent. For Stanley Quicke, this meant the 21st Reinforcements for the 10th Battalion.



# PARTS OF AIF RECORDS



The **Casualty Form—Active Service** form is where you will find most of the information about what happened during the period of service:

- Transfer from one place, hospital or unit to another
- Changing status (e.g. promotion, disciplinary action, decorations)
- Wounded, missing, dead

It often also contains other medical information. Please treat this information with respect when writing your biography, particularly if it is not related to service. So instead of stating specific illnesses, you could write that the serviceman was hospitalised for an infection.

A Casualty Form was written on by many different military clerks, often with quite different handwriting, and contains many abbreviations and acronyms. It is often hard to read.

1459-15-6. 45th INF - BATTALION, AIF. Army Form B. 103.

**Casualty Form - Active Service.**

Regiment or Corps *45th Bn* Rank *Platoon* Name *Bailey, R.E.H.* "MM"

Regimental No. *4488* Enlisted (a) *2nd/9/15* Terms of Service (a) Service reckons from (a) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of promotion to present rank \_\_\_\_\_ Date of appointment to lance rank \_\_\_\_\_ Numerical position on roll of N.C.O's. \_\_\_\_\_

Extended \_\_\_\_\_ Re-engaged \_\_\_\_\_ Qualification (b) \_\_\_\_\_

REPORT		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, &c., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36 or other official documents.
Date	From whom received				
<i>6/13/16</i>	<i>C.O. Training Battalion</i>	<i>allotted to &amp; proceeded to join 45th Battalion</i>	<i>Ex Zeitoun</i>	<i>6/16</i>	<i>A.P. 5055 45TH BATN G.S. A. P. 422</i>
<i>2-6-16</i>	<i>C.O. "Kilnane Castle"</i>	<i>Proceeded to join R. T. Algharia 1-6-16</i>	<i>Marseilles</i>	<i>1-6-16</i>	<i>AP8613 278786</i>
<i>8/1/16</i>	<i>12 AFA</i>	<i>to Hospital</i>	<i>in the field</i>	<i>4-7-16</i>	<i>AR 992 DO 23/2785</i>
<i>10/2/16</i>	<i>Rejoined</i>	<i>Dis. to duty</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>7-7-16</i>	<i>AT 2396</i>
<i>10/2/17</i>	<i>Appd Lance Corporal</i>	<i>allotted to 45th Bn</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>2-17</i>	<i>D 13/6 209/217 258</i>

When the event was reported, not when it happened.  
**Note the unit;** otherwise ignore.

This is the most important field:  
**what actually happened.**

When and where the event actually happened:  
**this is important.** Often quite generic: France, Field, Etaples.

References to the military filing system; this can be safely ignored.

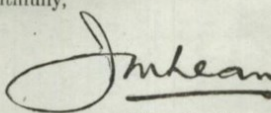


## READING AIF SERVICE RECORDS

# PARTS OF AIF RECORDS

Service Records also contain communication sent to or from the Ministry of Defence about the serviceman or service woman. This would include letters sent to families about hospitalisation or death, and letters sent from the families with information and inquiries.




**A** 170652  
**AUSTRALIAN**  **MILITARY FORCES.**  
**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**  
**Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.**  
 No. 6574 Name **QUICKE STANLEY HUBERT**  
 Unit \_\_\_\_\_  
 Joined on **AUG 14 1918**  
**Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation**  
 1. What is your Name? **Stanley Hubert Quicke**  
 2. In the Parish of \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**  
 B.R. Form No. 9.  
 In all communications regimental number, rank, full name, and unit of Soldier referred to are to be stated.  
**BASE RECORDS OFFICE.**  
**VICTORIA BARRACKS.**  
**MELBOURNE.**  
**3rd. Sept. 1918.**  
 Dear **Madam,** to advise you that **Private S.H. Quicke**  
 has been reported **admitted to Kitchener Military Hospital, Brighton, England,**  
**15/8/18., suffering from gunshot wound left hand.**  
 His postal address will be—  
**No. 6574 Pte. S.H. Quicke,**  
**10th. Battalion,**  
**Australian Imperial Force,**  
**Abroad.**  
**Don't fail to send change of your address to Base Records, Melbourne.**  
 In the absence of further reports it is to be assumed that satisfactory progress is being maintained, but anything later received will be promptly transmitted, it being clearly understood that if no further advice is forwarded this department has no more information to supply.  
 Yours faithfully,  
 **Major,**  
**Officer in Charge, Base Records.**

**10th Battalion 6574 Lance Corporal Stanley Hubert QUICKE**  
**A.I.F.**  
**X**  
 For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty C.O. 10th Bn. M.M.  
 on the 11th August 1918 near LIGNES.  
 Although slightly wounded in the hand and leg A.I.F.  
 L/Cpl QUICKE continued firing his Lewis Gun from his hip as he advanced and entirely wiped out an enemy machine gun crew who were causing casualties in our ranks.  
 Shortly after this he was again wounded but even then did not leave the field until ordered to do so.  
 During the whole of the engagement he set a fine example to his section.  
**Major General**  
**Commanding 1st Australian Division**

These stamps are for the **service (or campaign) medals**, issued to all soldiers who met the eligibility criteria.

Because Stanley Quicke did not serve overseas in 1914/15, he has N.E. written in his **1914/15 Star**, meaning "Not Eligible". He did receive the **British War Medal** and the **Victory Medal**, which were given to all who served overseas during the Great War. Note the numbers written in: each medal had the recipient's name, rank, service number and unit engraved on the rim.

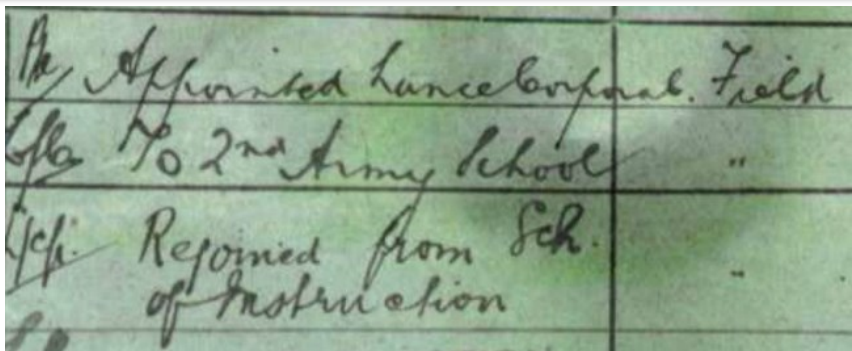
**DATE** **Form B 103, Received** **PURPORT.**  
**AUG 27 1918** **W. O. K. Advised Wounded**  
**SEP 3 1918** **W. O. K. Advised in Hospital**  
**17 JUL 1919** **W. O. K. Advised returning to Australia. Form 103**  
**3. 11. 19.** **Medal received; Sent to Commandant. M.D. BRM 46/453.**  
**WAR HISTORY INDEX**  
**Discharged M.D.**  
  
  











# READING HANDWRITING



This can be the trickiest part of reading First World War service records, but don't let it stop you from understanding the document. Think of it as a puzzle or a coded message: start by finding words that you can read easily. Write it all out; this ensures you read every word and helps you spot gaps.

Follow the steps below, stick with it and you will get there.



	= c		= h
	= d		= i
	= e		= l
	= f		= o
			= s

Appointed Lance Corporal Field  
L/C To 2nd Army School  
L/Cp Rejoined from Sch. of Instruction

## A few techniques for reading those difficult words:

- **Use the context.** Can you guess the uncertain word from those around it? Can you at least work out what sort of word it is (e.g. a name, a rank).
- Bear in mind this was written by a clerk who was probably in a hurry. He may not have crossed his t's or dotted his i's. He may have had difficulty fitting his letters into the space.
- **Compare** the difficult letters with other letters in words you can read. Perhaps the clerk has an unusual way of writing an S or a D, and you've seen it written in another word. **Writing out these letters to form a "letter key"** (as above) is a really helpful technique. But not foolproof: note the similarity between h and L in the example above.
- Beware of letter combinations. The letters *in* often look like *m*; *h* can look like *k* or *d*; *n* can look like *u*.
- **Write down the possibilities** in a difficult word: (1) the letters you're certain of, (2) the letters where it might be a *d* or a *h* or a *k*, and (3) the letters you have no idea of. Work through the various combinations until you have one which fits.
- Isolate the difficult words and **get someone else to look at them** – without telling them what you think the word is.



# ABBREVIATIONS



Although it is great to be able to read every word in a Service Record, sometimes even professional historians find this difficult. You can get around this by looking for important keywords that will help you to discover and tell the story of your soldier. Here are some of the main keywords and their common abbreviations, so you know what to look for. Remember: different clerks might use different abbreviations.

Term	Common abbreviation	What it means	Example
Taken On Strength	<i>T.O.S.</i>	Joining a new unit, added to that unit's "strength" roster.	<i>Taken on strength re 10 Am Detail</i>
Rejoined	<i>Rej'd</i>	Returned to unit after absence	<b>REJOINED UNIT</b> <i>of Sick.</i>
Admitted	<i>Adm.</i>	Admitted to hospital (often with the reason listed)	<i>Adm. Sore leg Adm. Impetigo</i>
General Shrapnel Wound / Gun Shot Wound	<i>G.S.W.</i>	Covers wounds by bullets, shrapnel, shell fragments etc—any flying projectile or debris.	<i>Adm. G.S.W. Back. G.S.W. Leg</i>
Awarded [ <i>medal</i> ]	<i>Awd</i>	Given a decoration	<i>Awd Military Medal</i>
Ditto	<i>do</i> or " <i>"</i>	Same as above	<i>do do do</i>



# ABBREVIATIONS



Term	Common abbreviation	What it means	Example
Embarked	[often stamped]	Got on the ship (usually with name of ship)	Place Embarked Date 11-3-16
Marched in ex [place]	M/I	Arrived at a place from (ex = Latin "out of") another place	Marched in Ex. England
Marched out	M/O	Left a place (sometimes "for" or "to" another place)	M/out to N°1 Com Opz S/Veng
Appointed / Promoted	App.	Raised in rank	Appd Lance Corporal
To be [rank]		Promotion to take effect at a set date	To be Corporal vice vice 710 Cpt. Blinkinsop, K.I.F.
Reverted to [rank]		Soldier was temporarily promoted; that has now ended.	Reverts to Rank of Private marching out to Adair Cairn
Absent Without Leave	A.W.L.	A crime: being away from the unit without permission.	CRIME: A.W.L. from Tattoo 9-30p.m. 2.8.17 to Reveille 6a.m. 3.2.17 (1 day)
Field Punishment	F.P. 1 or 2	A punishment: hard labour (with or without restraints)	7 days F.P. No. 2 for drinking on duty
Confined to Barracks	C.B.	A punishment: not permitted to leave the barracks.	Charged with using offensive language & threatening an N.C.O. Awarded, 21 days C.B. & forfeiture of 2 days pay
Commanding Officer	C.O.	The person in command of the unit (usually the battalion or equivalent)	CO. 45th Bn

# ABBREVIATIONS



## Ranks

**Pte** = Private (equivalent to Sapper, Driver, Gunner, Trooper)

**L/Cpl** = Lance Corporal

**Cpl** = Corporal

**Sgt** = Sergeant

**S/Sgt** = Staff Sergeant

**W/O** = Warrant Officer

**2/Lt** = Second Lieutenant  
(pronounced "Leftenant").

**Lt** = Lieutenant

**Capt** = Captain

**Maj** = Major

**Lt Col** = Lieutenant Colonel

## Fate

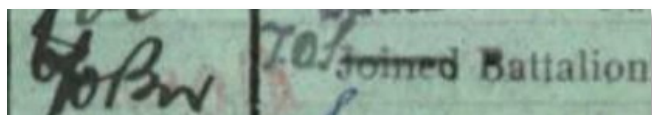
**KIA** = Killed in Action

**RTA** = Returned to Australia

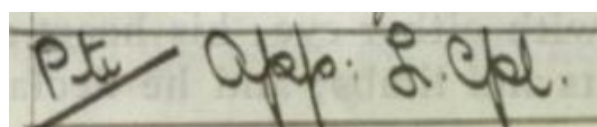
**DoW** = Died of Wounds

**DoD** = Died of Disease

**Disch.** = Discharged



(10 Bn = 10th Infantry Battalion)



Pte = Private; L. Cpl = Lance Corporal)

## AIF structure

- The key unit was the **Battalion** (Bn), theoretically c. 1000 strong. Raised in each state, this was the main permanent administrative unit.
- Each Battalion received periodic **Reinforcements** (Reinf), raised in Australia. Each numbered Reinforcement (e.g. 5th/10th Bn) left Australia together and was absorbed into the parent battalion; this is shown by TOS in the Casualty Form.
- Below the Battalion were the **Company** (Coy) of c.200 men and the **Platoon** (Pl).
- Above the Battalion were the **Brigade** (Bde), made up of four Battalions, and the **Division** (Div), made up of three Brigades plus artillery.
- Each battalion had its own **C.O.** (Commanding Officer).

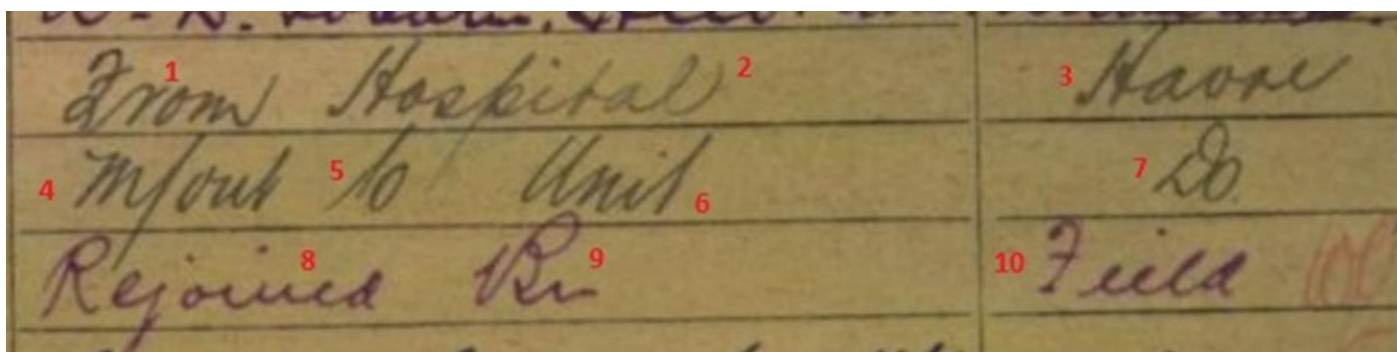


## READING AIF SERVICE RECORDS

# EXERCISE



Those are the techniques.  
Let's practice.



Here are three lines from a Casualty Form for an AIF soldier who fought on the Western Front. Bearing in mind there are abbreviations here, make a list:

- Which words can you read easily?
- Which can you probably read, or read with difficulty?
- And which can't you read?

Let's narrow down that middle list, the words you can read with difficulty:

- Which letters are you sure of? **Write them out.**
- Of the letters you're not sure about, **do any resemble letters in the words you know?**
- **Apply the techniques** we learned on previous pages. Look at the list of common abbreviations.

Now you probably have most of the words figured out, with a few you're still not sure of. What type of word needs to go in that spot? Is it a place name? Ask other students, or your teacher. If you still can't work it out, take a screenshot, attach a link and email the Schools Program Manager: [schools.program@vwma.org.au](mailto:schools.program@vwma.org.au).

READING AIF SERVICE RECORDS

# FINDING MORE HELP



Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just cannot find the information you need. That is ok; there is a lot of help out there.

For help with understanding abbreviations, see our [Abbreviations and Glossary](#) on the VWMA website

Australian War Memorial Glossary: <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/glossary>

National Archives of Australia Abbreviations used in WW1 and WW2 Service Records:

<https://www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/defence-and-war-service-records/researching-war-service/abbreviations-used-world-war-i-and-world-war-ii-service-records>

Can't find the answer there, or have other questions about the service records? Visit the Virtual War Memorial Schools Program page on Facebook and post your question. We will answer your questions as quickly as we can. Or email us at: [schools.program@vwma.org.au](mailto:schools.program@vwma.org.au)

Or email us at: [schools.program@vwma.org.au](mailto:schools.program@vwma.org.au)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P10894.007.002

SISTER IDA MOCKRIDGE (Left)  
WITH HER GOOD FRIEND KATH-  
ERINE "KIT" McNAUGHTON AND  
OFFICER FRIENDS ON LEMNOS.  
Australian War Memorial,  
P10894.007.002.



**VIRTUAL**  
WAR MEMORIAL  
AUSTRALIA

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Ground Floor  
Torrens Training Depot  
1 Victoria Drive  
ADELAIDE SA 5000  
Phone: 0493 559 759

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