



*A Soldier Story*

*By Joshua Curtis*

# *James Joseph Robinson*



40638 Private Auckland Regiment NZEF

15th October 1896 - 26th March 1918

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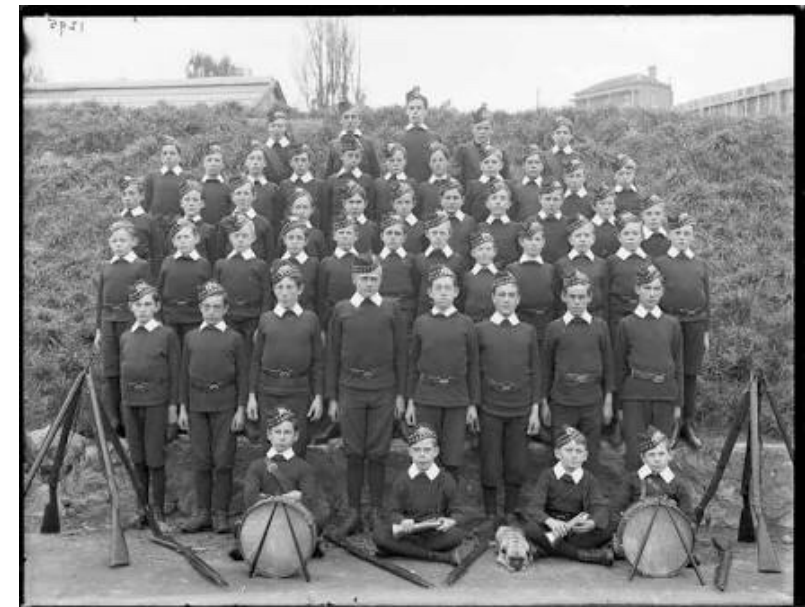
# *Personal Background*

James Robinson was the son of James Joseph Robinson (senior) and Katherine J Robinson. James was most likely named after his father as this was a popular thing to do at the time. His last known address before leaving to go to war was Killarney Bay, Waiiau Pa, Putamohoe. He was born in Auckland on the 13th October 1986 and was a British subject. His mother was Irish and his father was a New Zealander.

As a boy, he joined the cadets and completed military training in Manurewa. The Defence Act 1909 made this compulsory for all boys aged 12 and over. James enlisted in the army when he was 20, he had blue eyes, brown hair, normal eyesight and a healthy body. He was considered fit for service on his medical form. At the time he enlisted he was single, had no children and no criminal record.



A Picture of Waiuku, a Suburb Near Putamahoe



School cadets in the early 1900's

# Education

James went to the Wairua Pa primary school and then moved onto Sacred Heart College in 1908 for his secondary schooling.

He was at Sacred Heart for three years from 1908-10. During this time he studied towards and passed the Fourth Educational Standard. Sacred Heart was located in Ponsonby at this time. It was a Roman Catholic school for boarders and day students. It opened in 1903.



A Chemistry Class In 1912 At Sacred Heart College.



This a picture of his memorial at his old primary school, Wairua Pa



The first Sacred Heart School in Ponsonby

# Work After Leaving College

After leaving school he worked as a farmer for his father on the family homestead.

Little is known about the farm that the Robinson's owned but there is a good chance they either produced dairy or meat. The Auckland Region for farming changed dramatically in the early 1900's. Auckland City thrived as dairy and grazing for meat expanded.

Meat and dairy produce were processed in Auckland factories at Penrose and Otahuhu and exported from its ports. This is close to where the Robinson's lived.

Rural people like the Robinson's farmed cows commercially but also kept house cows from which they got their own milk and also butter and cheese.



Man Milking His House Cow In The Early 1900's



Transporting Cream

# Enlistment in Army

James Robinson enlisted in the army on the 28th October 1916 to be part of the 23rd reinforcement.

U. Coy. 23rd Inf.

(E.F. Form No. 2.)

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.**

**110638 ATTESTATION FOR GENERAL SERVICE.**

QUESTIONS TO BE PUT TO THE RECRUIT.

1. What is your name? ... *James Joseph Robinson*
2. Where were you born? ... *Australia*
3. Are you a British subject? ... *Yes*
4. What is the date of your birth? ... *15th October 1896*
5. What are the names of your parents? ...  
 (Father: *James Joseph Robinson*)  
 (Mother: *Elizabeth Robinson*)
6. Where were your parents born? ...  
 (Father: *S. S. New Zealand*)  
 (Mother: *Ireland*)
7. If they are of alien origin, when and where were they naturalized? ...
8. How long have you been resident in New Zealand? ... *Since birth*
9. How long have your parents been resident in New Zealand? ...  
 (Father: *Since birth*)  
 (Mother: *20 years*)
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? ... *Wairau Pa. Invercargill*
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? ... *John J. Robinson Wairau Pa.*
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? ...
17. If single, how many persons are absolutely dependent on you? ... *no*
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. ... *Since birth*
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 ever been registered for compulsory military training under the Defence Act, 1909? If so, where? ... *yes Manurewa*
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 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*
26. For which Reinforcement draft do you volunteer? ... *23rd Reinforcement*

NOTE.—Your discharge will not be granted before you return to New Zealand unless permission for discharge elsewhere be obtained from the G.O.C. the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

I, *James Joseph Robinson*, 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: *J. J. Robinson*  
 Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Oath to be taken by Recruit on attestation.

I, *James Joseph Robinson*, 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 *Wairau*, N.Z., on this *28th* day of *Oct*, 1916.

Signature of Attesting Officer: *J. E. Mackay*

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

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

# Enlistment In Army- Training

There is no record of where he trained but there were many military training camps set up around New Zealand. In January 1916 New Zealand's biggest army training camp opened in Featherston and it was later in that year that James did his training. Around 60,000 young men trained there for service on European battlefields between 1916 and 1918. It is likely that this is where James went to.



Featherston Training Camp in 1916

## *Enlistment In Army- Training*

At the camp they trained infantry men, artillery men, cavalry and machine gunners. James was in the 23rd reinforcement battalion which would of meant he would of trained as a infantry man.

The 16 week training programme began with three weeks of recruits drill and physical training at Trentham { another military camp} followed by four weeks - mostly spent at Featherston of drill, physical training, bayonet fighting, elementary musketry, individual training and elementary night training. Final leave in the 9th and 10th week was followed by platoon and company drill, more night operations, physical training, bayonet fighting and advanced musketry.

## *Enlistment In Army- Training*

Drills helped install a soldierly spirit by teaching the men to follow orders and act in unison.

The main training grounds also had a number of realistic Western Front trench networks which the recruits used for practice. They also spent nights away learning how to survive on their own.



Training at Featherston, 1917, New Zealand

# *The RMS Ruapehu*

James left Wellington, New Zealand on the vessel Ruapehu on 14th March 1917 and arrived in Devonport, Devon in England on 21st May 1917.

Life on board the Ruapehu was very crowded. The men tended to sleep on the decks because it was too hot to sleep anywhere else.



Soldiers Exercising On The Deck Of The Ruapehu 1917



The Vessel Ruapehu 1916



Soldiers Of The 23rd Reinforcement Laying Out Beds On Board The Troopship Ruapehu In 1917

# Arrival In England

When James arrived in England and was awaiting transfer to the Western Front, he was stationed at Sling Camp in Wiltshire. The camp was used throughout the war to train new reinforcements and casualties who were regaining fitness. The routines there were very similar to the ones used in the New Zealand camps.

He left for France a month later on the 21st June 1917.



The 23rd Reinforcement Hat Badge



Sling Camp, Wiltshire, England 1917

Army Form B. 103. **Casualty Form - Active Service.** Regimental Number: 10638

Rank: Plt Surname: *Howson* Christian Name: *James Leslie*

Religion: ... Age on Enlistment: ... years ... months

Enlisted on: 28.10.16 Terms of Service: ... Service reckons from (a) 11.11.16

Date of promotion to present rank: ... Date of appointment to lance rank: ...

Extended: ... Re-engaged: ... Qualification (b): ... or Corps Trade and rate: ...

Occupation: ... Signature of Officer: ...

Report Date	From whom received	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks
		Embarked	W. G. 12.3.17	
		Disembarked	21.5.17	
22.5.17	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	21.5.17	130139
21.6.17	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	21.6.17	110m 1000
26.6.17	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	26.6.17	1000
3.7.17	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	3.7.17	1000
4.7.17	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	4.7.17	1000
11.8.17	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	11.8.17	1000
12.1.18	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	12.1.18	1000
16.1.18	Br. ...	1st A.I.B. Sling	16.1.18	1000

Marched In 1st A.I.B Sling.

This Is James' Record That Shows Where And When He Was Transferred To Different Places. The A.I.B Stands For The Auckland Infantry Battalion.

# *During The War*

During the war James Joseph Robinson only served in the Somme on the Western Front.

At the front, James suffered influenza on the 11th July 1917, a virus more commonly known as the 'flu'. He was admitted to hospital on the 12th July and discharged on the 15th July. At war influenza could become very severe due to the terrible hygiene.

James also suffered from measles and was admitted again into hospital from the 16th December 1916 and was discharged on the 29th in the same month. He would have spent Christmas at hospital which would not have been very good for his spirit.



The Western Front 1916-1918



A Doctor Treating A Patient In A Base Hospital  
In WWI

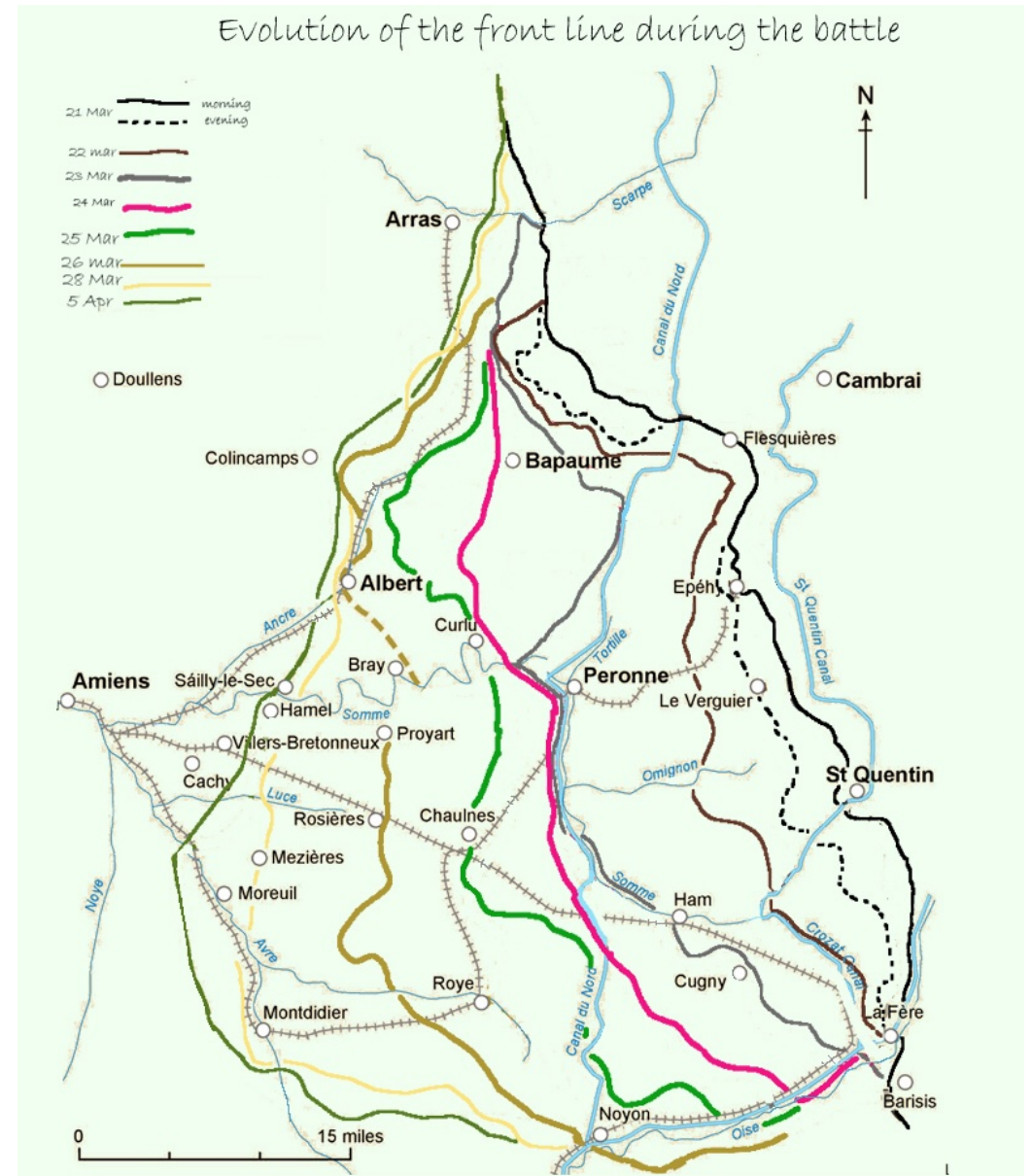
# During The War (continued)

There is evidence that James might have had an issue with authority or tried to escape from the front. He was caught trespassing on the railway and he failed to produce his identity disc. He was also caught giving false information to an officer.

As a punishment he was reprimanded and his pay was cut. He was also put in the field prison for 7 days. These offences have been recorded on the 6th february 1918 in his war records about a month before his death.

CONDUCT-SHEET.				
Regiment or Corps.	Place.	Date.	Offence.	Punishment.
16 <sup>th</sup> Coy, 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn. Anzac Bde.	Field.	6.2.18	Trespassing on railway concern to A.R. 0.12.88 Failing to produce an identity disc & stating a falsehood to an officer.	4 days F.P. 1002. & Fines - 7 days and pay

James' Conduct Record Sheet



A Map Showing The Somme And The Evolution Of The Front Lines During March 1918

# *The Final Battle For My Soldier*

James died on the 26th March 1918 in the Somme. He arrived at the Cassel train station near the battlefield on the evening of Sunday 24th March, led by Captain H.

R. Vercoe. The next day the soldiers made for a divisional concentration point which was a small base. While on the road they saw many refugees fleeing the warfare with hardly anything to keep them warm. It must have been very depressing for the soldiers to witness. In the evening the men set up camp and made final preparations for the days ahead.



A Portrait Of Captain H. R. Vercoe

At midday of the 26th, most of the 1st and 2nd Auckland Battalion men had made it to the concentration point or small base. The New Zealanders were ordered to reinforce a weak area of the English front. The enemy, who had already discovered this weak spot, were advancing kilometres forward. At all costs the men had to close this gap. The leading sections of the New Zealand Battalions were then thrown into battle. The Hun advance guards were eventually driven back.



The Battle In The Somme

# *The Final Battle For My Soldier*

The 15th and 16th companies, the 16th company being James' company, then led an Auckland advance up the Sere road. The enemy fire was intense and during this time many New Zealand soldiers were killed. From the sunken road to the enemy guns there was only a hundred and twenty yards of open, gentle slope. As darkness began to fall on the 26th, Captain Vercoe gave the signal to the 16th Company to charge the enemy up this small hill. This attack also resulted in a large number of casualties.

Even though James died on this date, he still made a contribution to the army and helped in stopping the German advance which would have had a positive impact on the allies.

*May He Rest In Peace*

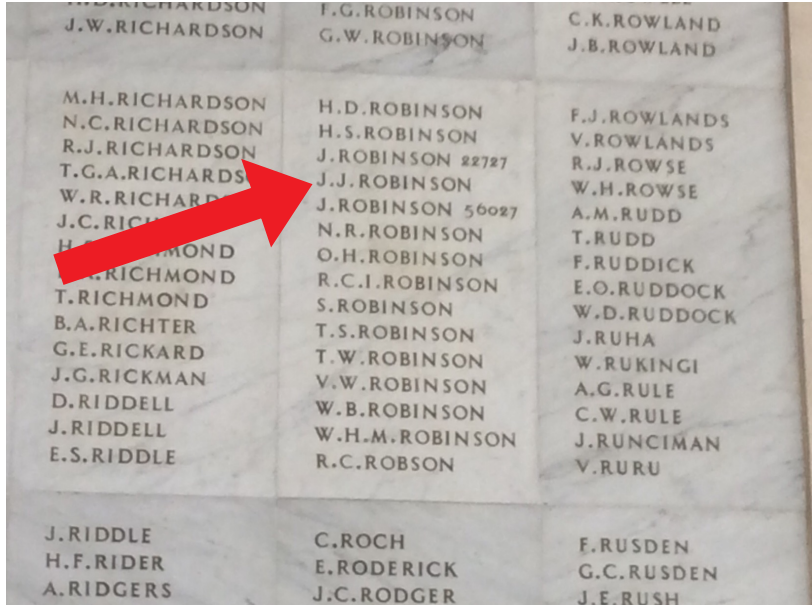


The Battle In The Somme



The German Advance

# Pictures At Auckland Museum



James' name in the Hall Of Honour



The Medals James Won



The Shrine For The Soldiers whom served in WWI



The Weapon He May Have Used

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## Books:

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By Tim Shoebridge

The New Zealand Division 1916-1919 A Popular History Based On Official Records  
By Col. H. Stewart

The Auckland Regiment N.Z.E.F 1914-1918  
By Lieut. R. Judson, VC  
Sergeant Samuel Forsyth, VC  
Private J. Crighton, VC

Sacred Heart College Roll Of Honour

## Magazines:

Our Grins 23rd Reinforcement Troopships-Ruapehu  
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