Casualties of War

Wounded Soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary force of World War I

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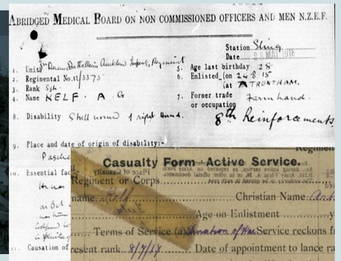
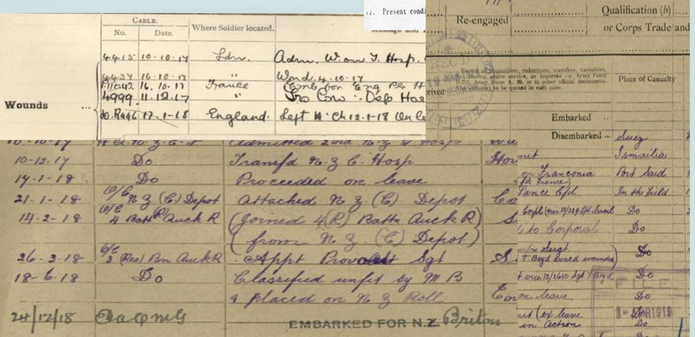
Introduction

Casualties are an unfortunate consequence of any war. During World War I alone, according to New Zealand historical records ," 18,000 New Zealanders died in or because of the war, and 41,000 men were listed as wounded.. With an approximate total of 120,000 men enlisted"(1).Considering that the population of New Zealand in 1914 was just over a million, 12 percent of its population served during the war and almost half of the men enlisted were wounded and or killed in action. These numbers present a great opportunity to study the casualties of war, the types of wounds and classification of their discharge.

Identifying the casualties

The Casualties of war have been identified by volunteers working on the ANZACs project. http://www.measuringtheanzacs.org/ There are many documents in which wound/ casualties can be found throughout the soldier's records. A few examples of these are the casualty form. Wounds on the history sheet,promotion reductions and casualty section on the history sheet, casualty form of active service, hospital records and medical board records. The records for this project were randomly selected.

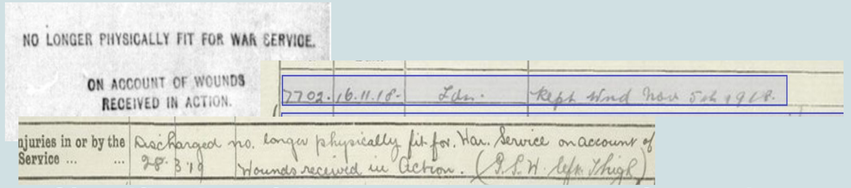




Data:

The records used for this project were selected based on whether they had medical records within their file. One of the main challenges was making out some of the scanned documents that were of poor quality. The second challenge was to transcribe cursive to print and to decipher some of the annotations used. Some of the abbreviations were commonly used like "GSW" gunshot wound , but others were short handed notes used by the different officers recording the casualties. These took more ingenuity to transcribe by looking at the other words around them and trying to put them within context of the rest of the sentences. The casualties of these soldiers were recorded mostly but not limited to the forms mentioned earlier. Some wounds were more descriptive than others, and often the description was not limited to the space provided within the forms, and it expanded to other fields. Depending on the form where the casualty was recorded, it usually included a date, place, what type of injury and where it had happened as well as the officer entering the information, however, some entries only mentioned that the soldier was wounded or when the medical board had deemed the soldier unfit for service. Compiling the information of each wound required flipping through the pages of the records and scavenging pieces of information to put them together. Unfortunately not all files had all the pieces of the casualty received by the soldier.

The records of soldier John McShane is an example of where the injury described is in three places and by putting the three together one can make sense of where it happened , what happened and what was the outcome of such injury , in his case , he was discharged because he was no longer physically fit for war service.https://www.measuringtheanzacs.org/#/mark?subject_set_id=57976688373834000afd0700



Classification of discharged on account of wounds:

The records studied for these project were a total of 100. An emphasis was of the project was to see the effect of the injuries received by the soldiers in regards to their discharge. Six categories were created.

1. Discharged unfit for war service by medical board on account of injuries received in action.
2. Discharged upon termination of employment
3. Died of wounds
4. Killed in action
5. Missing
6. Discharged not specified.

The majority of the soldiers were discharged due to wounds received in action and were deemed medically unfit for war service. Not all injuries happened in the field or in action but in camp in everyday life situations like participating in a soccer game or a burn while in the kitchen. For the missing men, they were assumed dead because their bodies could not be found or because the last place they were listed in was missing, like in the case of trooper McMurchie John whose submarine was torpedoed and he was assumed drowned .

Classification of injuries

- Gunshot wounds
- Gas poisoning
- Shrapnel
- Enteritis
- Bronchitis
- Debility/Weakness
- Burns
- Fractures
- Ulcers

The most common injury was caused by gunshot and it often ended in discharge as unfit for war service. Others like gas poisoning, enteritis, bronchitis and debility were not an immediate cause of discharge but more of a chronic condition that ultimately lead to an unfit for war discharge.

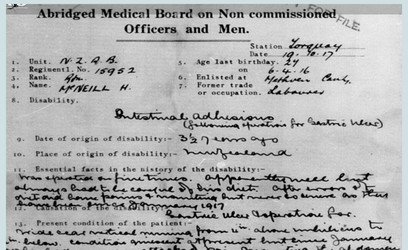
Future Research Questions

The number of casualties and injured men of the New Zealand Expiratory service, compared to the size of New Zealand's population in 1914 was close to 12 percent. As these soldiers returned to their homes and seeked employment it would be of interest to examine the effect on society and in New Zealand's economy as these veterans returned physically and/or mentally injured.

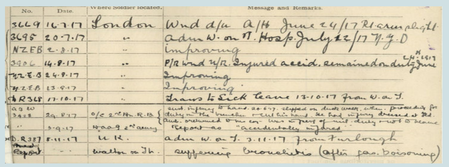
Some of the injuries identified that lead to an unfit discharged contained signed witness statements that attested to the validity of the injuries in dispute both on the field and while in camp. The military had then to determine who was at fault for such injuries and how much if any compensation was to be granted and for how long. Could it be argued that these statements were a consequence of invalid claims of injuries attained on purpose by distressed soldiers looking for a way home? Further research could shed some light to this matter and to the mental state of these soldiers.

Case studies:

Private McNeill Hugh.
https://www.measuringtheanzacs.org/#/mark?subject_set_id=5613996a633437000be90100
He was injured in the field but was able to rejoin his unit. He was discharged not because of his injury received in the field but as a result of intestinal adhesions. He was ultimately discharged as unfit for war service on accounts of injuries received from the five operations he had performed to try to control his ulcers.This is a good example of a three and one half years chronic condition received while in service. His injury may have been due to the availability of food that aggravated his condition or perhaps his own food choices.



Rifleman Forrest James Henry.
https://www.measuringtheanzacs.org/#/mark?subject_set_id=579823f96362360009e34100
He was discharged as unfit for war service due to bronchitis caused by gas poisoning. He was classified unfit a few months after his injury by the medical board.



Acknowledgements:

I express my gratitude to the volunteers of the ANZAC's project and Professor Evan Roberts for his mentoring and guidance throughout this project.

Citation:

1. History guide.(n.d) retrieved December 7,2017, from https;//ww100.govt.nz/history-guide