



UNDERSTANDING BRITISH ARMY

SERVICE PAPERS

By History Recon | www.historyrecon.co.uk

In this handy guide you'll find the following content on understanding:

Attestation Papers
Statement of Service
Medical History
Casualty Form

If you've discovered your ancestor served in the British Army during the First or Second World War, chances are you've come across a bundle of military documents – often handwritten, sometimes confusing, but rich with hidden detail. These service records can seem impenetrable at first glance: filled with abbreviations, formal military language, and scattered references to events you may know nothing about.

Within those forms lies the story of a man's journey through war – where he served, what he endured, and how his military life unfolded.

This guide is designed to help you make sense of it all.

We'll take you through the key documents found in a typical service record – such as the Attestation Paper, Casualty Form, Statement of Service, and Medical History – and explain what each one shows, how to interpret it, and what clues it can offer for further research. Along the way, we'll highlight common terms and military jargon, suggest practical research tips, and show how even a single line on a form can unlock a powerful piece of your family's history.

Whether you're just starting out or piecing together the final gaps in a soldier's timeline, this guide will help you read between the lines and bring those faded pages back to life.

ATTESTATION PAPERS (1)

The attestation paper (Army Form B.2505) was the official document signed by a soldier upon joining the British Army during the First World War. It marked the start of their military service and contains some of the most personal and useful genealogical information available.

Key Sections to Understand

1. Personal Information

- Full name: The name given at enlistment (may differ from formal/legal name)
- Age on enlistment: Sometimes rounded up/down; always compare to birth records
- Trade or calling: Their civilian occupation
- Marital status and children: May list spouse or dependents

1000—M. & Co., L.—8/14. Forms B 217 38 Army Form B. 217.

SHORT SERVICE.

(3) With the Colours and 9 years in the Reserve. If the man completes his 3 years' service with the Colours while beyond the seas, he will be sent home, with all convenient speed, for transfer to the Army Reserve.)

ATTESTATION OF

No. 9415 Name John Smith Corps Scots Guards

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlisting

1. What is your Name? John Smith
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? In the Parish of Haddington in the County of Haddington
3. Are you a British Subject? Yes
4. What is your Trade or Calling? Miner
5. Have you resided out of your Father's house for three years continuously in the same place, or occupied a house or land of the yearly value of £10 for one year, and paid rates for the same, and, in either case, if so, state where? No
6. You are hereby warned that if after enlistment it is found that you have given a wilfully false answer to any of the following seven questions, you will be liable to a punishment of two years' imprisonment with hard labour.
7. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? if so, where? to whom? for what period? and, when did, or will, the period expire? No
8. Are you Married? No
9. Have you ever been sentenced to Imprisonment by the Civil Power? No
10. Do you now belong to the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Marines, the Militia, the Special Reserve, the Territorial Force, the Army Reserve, the Militia Reserve, or any Naval Reserve Force? If so, to what Corps? No
11. Have you ever served in the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Marines, the Militia, the Special Reserve, the Imperial Yeomanry, the Volunteers, the Territorial Force, the Army Reserve, the Militia Reserve, or any Naval Reserve Force? If so, state which, and cause of discharge? No
12. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous Service? Yes
13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for the Military or Naval Forces of the Crown? If so, on what grounds? No
14. Are you willing to be vaccinated or revaccinated? Yes
15. For what Corps are you willing to be enlisted, or are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? Scots Guards
16. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? Yes (Name Sp. Baser Corps Scots Gds)
17. Do you understand that, notwithstanding you enlist for a dismounted Corps, you are liable to be trained and employed in such mounted duties as may be required? Yes
18. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?
 - (a) For the term of 12 years, for the first three years in Army Service and for the remaining nine years in the First Class Army Reserve. If at the termination of such period of Army Service you are serving beyond the seas, you will be sent home, with all convenient speed, for transfer to the Army Reserve.
 - (b) If, at the expiration of the above-mentioned term of Army Service, a state of War exists, then, if so directed by the Competent Military Authority, to serve in Army Service for a further period not exceeding 12 months.
 - (c) If, at the expiration of the above-mentioned term of Army Service, you are so required by a Proclamation from His Majesty in case of imminent national danger, or great emergency, then to serve in Army Service so as to complete your term of 12 years, and for a further period not exceeding 12 months.
 - (d) If the above-mentioned term of 12 years expires while you are on service with the Regular Forces—(i.) beyond the seas, or (ii.) while a state of war exists with a Foreign Power, or (iii.) while Soldiers in the Reserve are required by proclamation to continue in, or re-enter upon, Army Service, and you, in accordance with such proclamation, have re-entered upon Army Service, then to serve for a further period not exceeding 12 months.
 - (e) If, after you have been transferred to the Army Reserve, you are called out on permanent service, then to be liable to be transferred to any Corps requiring your services.Yes

I, John Smith, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT. John Smith

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS. Mr. James Schur

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, John Smith, do make Oath that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.

The above questions were then read to the recruit in my presence, and I have taken care that he understands each question; and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as printed to, and the said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at EDINBURGH on this 1st day of August 1914.

Signature of the Justice of the Peace or Attesting Officer. Mr. Charles R.S.O., Edinburgh. Captain.

If any alteration is required on this page of the Attestation, a Justice of the Peace should be requested to make it and initial the alteration under Section 80 (6), Army Act.

The Recruit should, if he require it, receive a copy of the Declaration on Army Form B. 217a.

Tip: This section helps confirm you've got the right person, especially when multiple individuals share the same name.

ATTESTATION PAPERS (2)

2. Enlistment Details

- Date and place of attestation: When and where the soldier signed up
- Unit joined: Often just the regiment, not the battalion (that may change later)
- Length of service agreed: Usually “For the duration of the war”

*Common misunderstanding:
This is not the date of
overseas deployment – it's
just when they enlisted.*

Description of		John Smith		on Enlistment.	
<p>Apparent Age.....19.....years.....270.....months. (To be determined according to the instructions given in the Regulations for Army Medical Services.)</p> <p>Height.....5.....feet.....11 1/2.....inches.</p> <p>Weight.....142.....lbs.</p> <p>Chest mea- (Girth when fully) 38.....inches. surement (expanded.....) Range of expansion 3 1/2.....inches.</p> <p>Complexion.....Fresh.....</p> <p>Eyes.....Blue.....</p> <p>Hair.....Brown.....</p> <p>Religious denomination</p> <p>Church of England.....</p> <p>Presbyterian.....Yes.....</p> <p>Wesleyan.....</p> <p>Baptist or Congregationalist.....</p> <p>Other Protestants.....</p> <p>(Denomination to be stated)</p> <p>Roman Catholic.....</p> <p>Jewish.....</p>		<p>Distinctive marks, and marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease.</p> <p>(Should the Medical Officer be of opinion that the recruit has served before, he will, unless the man acknowledges to any previous service, attach a slip to that effect, for the information of the approving Officer.)</p> <p>None</p>			
<p align="center">Certificate of Medical Examination.</p> <p>I have examined the above-named recruit and find that he does not present any of the causes of rejection specified in the Regulations for Army Medical Services.</p> <p>He can see at 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 that he is not subject to fits of any description.</p> <p>I consider him*.....fit.....for the Army.</p> <p>Date.....24/8.....1914.</p> <p>Place, Edinburgh.</p> <p>* Insert here "fit" or "unfit,"</p> <p align="right">Medical Officer.</p> <p>NOTE.—Should the Medical Officer consider the Recruit unfit, he will fill in the foregoing Certificate only in the case of those who have been attested, and will briefly state below the cause of unfitness:—</p>					
<p align="center">Certificate of Primary Military Examination.</p> <p>I hereby certify that the above named recruit was inspected by me, and I consider him</p> <p>*.....fit.....for service in the.....Scots Guards.....and that due</p> <p>care has been exercised in his enlistment,</p> <p>Date.....24/8.....1914.</p> <p>Place, Edinburgh.</p> <p>* Insert here "fit" or "unfit."</p> <p align="right">Recruiting Officer.</p>					
<p align="center">* Certificate of Approving Officer.</p> <p>I certify that this Attestation of the above-named recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required forms appear to have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the</p> <p align="center">Scots Guards</p> <p>If enlisted by special authority, Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.</p> <p>Date.....24/8.....1914.</p> <p>Place, Edinburgh.</p> <p align="right">Approving Officer.</p> <p align="center">R.S.O., Edinburgh.</p> <p>* The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit. † Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted.</p>					

3. Medical Examination

- Height, chest measurement, physical condition
- Notes on eyesight, dental health, and any disqualifying conditions

Insight: Some men were rejected initially but re-enlisted later when standards were lowered.

ATTESTATION PAPERS (3)

4. Oath of Allegiance

- The soldier's sworn statement agreeing to serve the King
- Signed by the recruit and a military official

Emotional weight: This section symbolises the formal start of their military journey.

Why It Matters for Family Research

- It places your ancestor in a specific regiment at a specific time
- It helps estimate birth year, location, and occupation
- It offers clues for tracing next steps: e.g. which unit's war diary to consult

WANT HELP INTERPRETING A COMPLEX OR INCOMPLETE RECORD? THAT'S WHAT WE DO BEST. VISIT [HISTORYRECON.CO.UK](https://historyrecon.co.uk) OR GET IN TOUCH — WE'D LOVE TO HELP YOU UNCOVER YOUR FAMILY'S WARTIME STORY.

STATEMENT OF SERVICE (1)

The Statement of Services is one of the most important – and confusing – pages in a WWI soldier's service record. It provides a timeline of the soldier's military career, but it's often handwritten, packed with abbreviations, and tricky to follow without experience.

What Is It?

A chronological record of a soldier's military movements
Tracks transfers, promotions, demotions, wounds, leave, and other
key events
Officially titled "Statement of the Services" and usually headed with
"Army Form B.200"

Think of it as the soldier's CV – but in military shorthand.

1. Date of Attestation & Posting

- Confirms when and where the soldier enlisted
- The first line typically shows transfer to the regimental depot or training battalion

2. Battalion Movements

- Look for entries like:
 - "Posted to 9th Battalion"
 - "Embarked for BEF" (British Expeditionary Force)
 - "Transferred to Labour Corps"
- These entries help you track which war diaries to consult

STATEMENT OF SERVICE (2)

3. Promotions & Demotions

- Ranks are often abbreviated (e.g. L/Cpl = Lance Corporal)
- Dates help you build a service timeline and understand career progression

4. Disciplinary Actions or Absences

- Often noted with terms like "Forfeits pay", "Absent without leave", or "FP No.1" (Field Punishment)

5. Wounds & Casualty Notations

- May include "Wounded in Action" or "To Hospital" entries
- Sometimes noted alongside promotions or reassignments

STATEMENT of the SERVICES of No. 9415 Name *John Smith*

Corps	Battn or Depôt	Promotions, Reductions, Casualties, &c.	Army Rank	Dates	Service not allowed to reckon for fixing the rate of Pension years days	Service in Re-served not allowed to reckon to wards G. C. Pay years days	Signature of Officers settling correctness Entries
Service towards limited engagement reckons from 24.8.14							
Joined at <i>Balerham</i> on 26.8.14							
SCOTS GUARDS	3	<i>Attended</i>	<i>Pte</i>	24.8.14			<i>A. Douglas</i> Capt. Regt. Adj. Scots Guards
	2	<i>TRANSFERRED</i>	<i>Pte</i>	16.3.15			<i>M. Pinner</i> Capt. Adj. 3rd Bn. Scots Guards
		<i>2 killed in action</i>	<i>Pte</i>	16.3.15			<i>M. Pinner</i> Capt. Regt. Adj. Scots Guards
Total Service forfeited as above							
Total Service towards Engagement to 16/3/15 (date of <i>DEATH</i>)							
Pension							

6. Discharge or Demobilisation

- Final lines typically include discharge date and reason:
 - "Para 392 (xvi)" (Time expired)
 - "Para 392 (xvi a)" (Medically unfit)
 - Often tied to pension records or Silver War Badge entitlement

MEDICAL HISTORY (1)

The Medical History form (usually Army Form B.178) is where you'll find official records of a soldier's health during his time in service – both before and during the war. It covers everything from enlistment examinations to wounds sustained in action and hospital treatment. Although it can appear sparse compared to other forms, it's an essential document for understanding the physical toll military service took on your ancestor, and it often holds vital clues for pension eligibility or discharge.

9415
Army Form B. 178.

To be used for recruits enlisting direct into the Regular Army only.
Army Form B178A to be used for Special Reserve recruits and
Special Reservists enlisting into the Regular Army.

MEDICAL HISTORY of

Surname Smith Christian Name John

TABLE I.—GENERAL TABLE

Birthplace ... Parish Gladsmuir County Haddington

Examined ... on 24th day of August 1914.
at EDINBURGH.

Declared Age ... 19. 270 days

Trade or Occupation ... Miner

Height ... 5 feet, 11½ inches.

Weight ... 143 lbs.

Chest { Girth when fully Expanded 35 inches.

Measurement { Range of Expansion 33 inches.

Physical Development and Pulse rate }

Vaccination { Arm ... Right. Left.

Marks { Number 2

When Vaccinated ...

Vision ... R.E.—V = 6
L.E.—V = 6 6
6

(a) Marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease (a) _____

(b) Slight defects but not sufficient to cause rejection (b) _____

Approved by (Signature) W. H. L. Lyle (Rank) _____ C8
Medical Officer.

Enlisted ... at EDINBURGH.
on 24th day of August 1914.

Joined on Enlistment ... Corps Scots Guards Regtl. No. 9415

Transferred to ...

Became non-effective by...
on _____ day of _____ 191

(Signature) _____
(Rank) _____

3000 8/14 M. & Co., Edin. Forms B. 178 37 P.T.O.

What Is It?

This form records a soldier's health history during their time in the British Army. It includes medical assessments made at the time of enlistment, as well as later entries covering sickness, wounds, hospital admissions, and long-term disabilities. In cases of discharge due to medical reasons, it usually contains a final board assessment. Think of it as the soldier's NHS file – military edition.

MEDICAL HISTORY (2)

What Can You Learn from It?

- Details of wounds or illness not always fully listed on the Casualty Form
- Hospitalisation timelines, which can be compared to war diaries for context
- Conditions leading to discharge or pension, useful for tracing Silver War Badge records or pension ledgers
- Rare insight into long-term effects of war (e.g. blindness, amputation, neurasthenia)

It also helps paint a more personal picture: not just where your ancestor fought, but what they physically endured.

III.—Boards; Courts of Enquiry, Vaccination, Inoculation, &c.; Examinations for Field or Foreign Service, Extension, Re-engagement or Prolongation of Service; Issue of Surgical Appliances; Particulars of Dental Treatment, &c.

Date: _____ Brief details, and signature: _____

1-9-14 Rb. Vacc: perfect
14 3 15 EXAMINED AND FOUND *fit*
FOR FIELD SERVICE. *Shaw*

M. H. H. H. H. H.
SURGEON LIEUT. COL.
IRISH GUARDS.

Table IV.—SERVICE TABLE.

Station or Troopship	Date of arrival or embarkation	Date of departure or disembarkation	Station or Troopship	Date of arrival or embarkation	Date of departure or disembarkation
Home	24 ⁵ / ₁₄				
Caterham	25 ⁸ / ₁₄				

Tip: If the form notes a wound or illness and gives a date, check the battalion's war diary for the surrounding days. You might uncover what action was taking place when the injury occurred — whether it was a major offensive or routine trench duty.

MEDICAL HISTORY (3)

How to Use It in Your Research

Start by comparing medical events to the Casualty Form — do the dates align? If your ancestor was sent home wounded or sick, this form often tells you how serious it was.

Next, use place names to trace their treatment journey — from front-line aid posts to base hospitals in France or convalescence at home. If the soldier was discharged for medical reasons, look up the discharge code and check whether a pension file survives (these are often separate from the service record and stored in the “WO 364” or “WO 363” series). Finally, if your ancestor was awarded a Silver War Badge, the reason for discharge on this form should match the entry on their SWB roll.

Tip: Terms like “debility,” “valvular disease,” or “NYD Nervous” (Not Yet Diagnosed – Nervous) may sound vague, but they were often precursors to shell shock or heart conditions. These can lead to separate pension files or appeals — a goldmine of personal detail if you know to look.

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CASUALTY FORM (1)

The Casualty Form is a detailed log of a soldier's service, tracking not just wounds but also transfers, hospital stays, leave, discipline, and even death. It offers a chronological snapshot of everything significant that happened after enlistment.

(4 27 1) W 4227-1105 100,000 11/15 H W V Form B. 103/1. 1862-249 124,000 9/14 Army Form B. 103.

Casualty Form-Active Service.

Regiment or Corps Scots Guards 835 9415

Regimental No. 9415 Rank Pte Name Smith, J.

Enlisted (a) 24.8.14 Terms of Service (a) 3 Service reckons from (a) 24.8.14

Date of promotion to) Date of appointment) Numerical position on)
present rank } to lance rank } roll of N.C.Os. }

Extended Re-engaged Qualification (b)

Report	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., 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
		EMBARKED-SOUTHAMPTON.	16.3.15.	Joined 2nd Batta.
				<u>25.5.15</u> <u>Pte.</u> <u>Missing</u> <u>18.5.15</u> <u>An. Cas. List</u>
		Killed in action.	In the Field, 16/5/15.	Authority is correspondence dated 29/7/15 from O.C.B.S.G.
	Gen Hdqrs, 3rd Echelon, British Exp Force.			
		Major for Lt. Col in charge Infantry Section, A G's Office at the Base		

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.
(b) e.g., Signaller, Shoring Smith, etc., etc., also special qualifications in technical Corps duties. [P.T.O.]

What does it contain?

The form is usually filled in by clerks and officers, sometimes in different handwriting and ink. Each new event is recorded with a date, a brief description of what happened, and often a location. These might include:

- Transfers to or from different battalions or units
- Hospital admissions and discharges (due to wounds, illness, or injury)
- Embarkation or disembarkation from overseas service
- Punishments or disciplinary notes
- Deaths, wounds, or being declared missing

Each line is a single event, but when read in sequence, they reveal the rhythm of a man's war.

CASUALTY FORM (2)

Common terms and phrases

You'll encounter a mix of abbreviations and formal military language. Instead of saying "gunshot wound," the form may simply say "GSW." A return to Britain might be recorded as "To UK" or "Home." Hospital entries often name the location or a specific Casualty Clearing Station. If a man is wounded, a note like "WIA" or "GSW, thigh" might appear. It's not always clear what the outcome was – but the follow-up entries (e.g. "Returned to duty" or "Discharged medically unfit") usually complete the picture.

What can you learn from it?

- **Timeline of service:** The Casualty Form helps you build a detailed chronology, especially when other documents are vague.
- **Movements between units or theatres:** You can often see exactly when a soldier left Britain, arrived in France, or moved between battalions.
- **Wounds and illness:** These are sometimes the only place where a soldier's injuries are recorded, particularly if his pension record is missing.
- **Hospital stays and recovery time:** If your ancestor was wounded, you may be able to track how long he was in medical care.
- **Discipline and punishment:** Notes on Field Punishment, confinement, or forfeiture of pay can offer insight into conduct during service.
- **Clues to a death:** If a soldier was killed, the form may record the place and date – or note when he was declared missing in action.

CASUALTY FORM (3)

Tip: The handwriting can be messy and the dates out of order. Writing each event out in sequence helps build a clearer timeline of your ancestor's service and movements.

How to use it in your research

Start by transcribing each dated entry in order. That alone will give you a clearer picture than just scanning the handwritten original. If a wound is mentioned, cross-reference the date with the relevant battalion war diary – this can help you identify which battle or engagement your ancestor was wounded in.

Place names can be mapped, giving a sense of movement through the war. Hospital locations, for example, can tell you how far back a man was evacuated after injury. Transfers between battalions may suggest heavy losses or reorganisations, especially after major battles.

Finally, compare the entries on the Casualty Form to the Statement of Service – the two should broadly align, but sometimes discrepancies appear. If they do, it's usually the B.103 that holds the more detailed (and sometimes more accurate) account.

Tip: If a wounding is recorded, check the battalion war diary for that date – it can often reveal the exact action or location where your ancestor was injured.

WHAT NEXT?

Decoding a service record is just the beginning. At History Recon, we turn these fragmented documents into full stories – detailed, explained, and ready to share.

Research Packages Available

We offer a range of digital packages to suit every stage of your research journey:

Basic Package

We confirm the identity and availability of surviving records and provide a short summary of what's accessible.

Standard Research Package

A full written report including transcriptions, explanations of key records, and regimental context.

Comprehensive Biography

A detailed, narrative-style biography including maps, photos, war diary insights, and optional extras like colourised images or a printable tribute page.

If you've found a service record but aren't sure what to make of it – or just want someone to do the legwork – get in touch. We'd be honoured to help you discover and share the story of your family's wartime past.

Visit www.historyrecon.co.uk
or email us directly at info@historyrecon.co.uk
to start your research.