

NEW ZEALAND'S WAR ARCHIVES

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My introduction to archives work was the New Zealand War Archives. My association with it has been a particularly long and close one. For years that dirty-green cabinet of catalogue cards for the collection was my close neighbour in War History Branch and in due course it followed to again share my room when I was reference archivist in National Archives. Today it is not far away and I am still using it, interpreting my youthful efforts at cataloguing and classification applied to a specialized archives collection. I can still recall classification numbers when more recent encounters are not so readily retrieved. In short War History and I are old friends and I feel my years when I find myself reminiscing, recalling the people and the archives as it were yesterday. I am proud to have worked with a group of very special people.

In many ways, this was a good introduction to archives work. The archives was not intimidatingly large. It could be encompassed as a whole and there was an opportunity to be involved in every part of archives work and to really see in practice how everything relates. One accessioned papers, sorted and organized them, carried out running repairs, put papers in envelopes or in a folder and labelled them, typed out lists and catalogue cards, prepared any other necessary finding aids and provided information from the archives. Subsequently, in my case, as a thesis student and also as a war history narrator I had cause to refer to the archives as a user. Maps, photographs, private and public papers were involved.

From archives work proper there were to some extent two significant divergences. Firstly the series lists—generally with such a specialized group our main aid was the card catalogue not a series list. Secondly there was little emphasis on appraisal—we kept most. However the principles of both these key archive functions were there. I learnt to think archivally and did have some practical experience. For example I recall working out how best to sample from a large range of Provost papers, an exercise which was later to be invaluable experience. The practical training is a useful partner to the theoretical requirement so essential for an archives institution proper, dealing with more than a specialized area. The essence of the War History system was practical adaptation for its purpose. I think it worked very well.

I believe credit for the organization of the War History Archives lies with the War Archivist, (the later Dr) E. H. McCormick, a far-sighted pioneer of archives in New Zealand. He had not continued with the Branch. My tutor was the able A. E. Monaghan—a rare mixture of scholar and practical jack of all trades.

Learning from the past and perhaps more conscious of history at the time of the 1939 centennial, New Zealand organized collection of archives, appointed a war archivist and considered the publication of war histories from the very start of the Second World War. Unit funds were to be used to provide some finance for the project.

By the end of the war the Archives Section included the core of

what was to become the War History Branch of Internal Affairs—one of the Archives Section, R. L. Kay remains in the successor to War History Branch, the Historical Publications Branch, with another ex War History man, I. M. Wards who heads the Historical Publications Branch. The War History Branch was lead by the prestigious Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger, who had a group of distinguished New Zealand historians commissioned to write histories. Professor F. L. W. Wood, D. M. Davin, Professor N. C. Phillips, W. G. McElymont to name just a few were all involved either in histories of campaigns or of the New Zealand civilian war effort. A second group was commissioned to write unit histories and this also included gifted writers. Yet other effort went into smaller publications, 'episodes and studies', to produce something more quickly than the full scale works. Behind these people were the full time staff—the narrators, mainly history graduates, who assembled sources and provided factual accounts to act as a basis for their authors. Then there were the archivists who cared for the archives and 'dug out' information for all and sundry.

How did the archives accumulate? How were they organized? The archives accumulated in two ways. Firstly, there was the official unit record which comprised the formal diaries, office records, orders, miscellaneous unit accounts, unit magazines. In short, records accumulated during the war in the day to day activity of the unit. Secondly there were the more self-conscious records, not the archives of the unit but of the War History Branch in that for the most part they came to the Branch as the result of requests by the war historians. The War History Branch sought reminiscences and private diaries and letters which may have been written during the war or subsequently. The War History narratives, and narratives and despatches from overseas were also included.

From the beginning a system was organized, although it was subsequently modified a little. When I arrived on the scene the system had been clarified and was in its final form, one preserved by the National Archives organization. The archival arrangement was in two classes—the unit and supplementary records. Unit material was assigned to the units, organized according to the battle order, which reflects archives principles. NZEF headquarters came first and so on down the organizational ladder. Each unit had a group number, for example 1 for HQ 2NZEF. Within these groups were subdivisions according to type. Here again it was archivally appropriate in that -/1 referred always to war diaries, the basic documentation, and so on down to -/15 which was a horrid miscellaneous section of 'unit historical records'. I should divert here to say that in my time we rather worked a disposal schedule on this. I gave -/15 to any rather untidy series of trivia, of value to a unit historian but possibly no one else—the type of record I would put down for destruction in due course. A third bar with number was added for each item within the series. Thus we have 1/1/1—HQ 2NZEF, War Diary number one. Office records, the '-/9 series', had often been numbered by the units. Primarily such papers were those of headquarters units, such as HQ 2NZ Division. In this case the number was preserved e.g. 21.1/9/G30. This is a system on much the same principle as that used in National Archives today. Archives

of forces in New Zealand in the Pacific theatre were differentiated from the rest as their numbers were prefixed DA Z, the remainder bearing DA for defence archives.

Supplementary material was a class I have already mentioned as being consciously acquired by the War History Branch. There were however amongst these some classes of records which could not readily be assigned to a unit or were more conveniently kept separate, for example voyage reports; citations; casualty lists of 2NZEF as a whole. Each class had a classification followed by a decimal geographic number — .2 combinations for the Middle East theatre and Italy and .3 combinations for the Pacific. Thus we would have all the eye-witness accounts for Italy as 441.28 with 441.28/4 the fourth to be accessioned. The code number was easy to recall; in a query about 20 Armoured Regiment in Italy, for example, without access to a catalogue one could before long retrieve much of the data available just from memory of the order of battle and classification system. Detailed retrieval did require use of the catalogue—this catalogue was very simple and based on our requirements. We wanted author names when there was an author and particular subjects when relevant. Generally however we needed units and campaigns or division of campaigns—here the Italian Campaign for example had to be divided up according to phases: Casino, Florence and Arno River, Riviere and Savio and so on. A detailed sheet series list gave ready reference to all these phases of the war, geographical breakdowns (for classification of the supplementary material) and unit organization. There was also a master card catalogue for subject headings to be used.

Maps were simply arranged by geographical area and scale—from general world maps to the most specific areas, from large to small scales. The published key sheets for series proved useful as checklists of holdings and finding aids.

The organization's photographic collection was a tribute to the ability of the late John Pascoe (subsequently to be Chief Archivist National Archives). His system was to give an accession number to the wide varied collection of items we received and to have negatives and glossy prints; and also a working print on the index cards which as in the general archives catalogue covered campaigns, and units in particular, but also such headings as the names of people, types of equipment and other likely subjects for illustrations for the war histories and also for the press who indeed were more likely to want to use the photographs than information from the written archives.

In 1968 when War History Branch (by then known as Historical Publications Branch) completed the last of its campaign volumes the archives were transferred to National Archives, apart from the photograph collection which was deposited at the Alexander Turnbull Library. National Archives has created a special archival group for 'War Archives'. This includes archives of New Zealand forces in the South African War; the First and Second World Wars; the Occupation Force in Japan; the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency (1955-67).

The archives of the First World War arrived in National Archives custody in a state of comparative disorganization. They and the other

eras of war activity have been organized on the War History Second World War pattern. As already noted the War History Branch organization and finding aids have been maintained, but the entire group is described in the customary National Archives sheet series list.

There is a notable omission: no oral records, merely typed transcripts of some broadcast interviews. We hope New Zealand will never be involved in another conflict but if so there will need to be more attention to the gathering of oral archives. Archival film coverage likewise is an unfortunate gap.

The use of the archives has changed; war veterans wanting to organize reunions or check on facts and television journalists are probably the main clientele. The War History organization can adapt itself reasonably well to the change.

Of recent years the War Document programme of the Alexander Turnbull Library and National Archives is adding a new dimension to the war archives of New Zealand. We have next to co-ordinate closely the closed group of the old War History Branch and this new growing collection which is more a manuscript collection than an archives group.