

GREAT WAR STORIES

Anthony James Johnstone

Remembering the sacrifices of those with South Canterbury connections who served their country 100 years ago.

CAROL BELL

Anthony James Johnstone, known as Jim or Jimmie, was born on 14 May 1889 at Geraldine, the second child and elder son of Norwegian-born Anton Johnson and his wife, Elizabeth Sophia Valentine née Crafer.

In February 1889 his father, Anton, offered for sale his "compact and handy little farm" situated close to the Geraldine Saleyards, as he was leaving the colony. Anton, however, was listed in the 1890 electoral roll and subsequently died, in December 1891, and is buried in the Geraldine Cemetery.

AJ Johnstone's next-of-kin in 1914 was a brother, William Johnstone, of Hawera.

Jim was a member of the Geraldine football team which played for the President's Trophy in the seven-a-side tournament held on 24 May 1907. He was again named in a Geraldine team in June 1911, to play against Star-Pirates.

In 1910 he is found participating in cycling events – in the 440 yards cash handicap (with a very small handicap) at the Temuka sports and with a much bigger handicap (35 minutes) in the Timaru to Christchurch road race.

Before enlistment, Anthony was living at the Crown Hotel in Geraldine and working as a carter, probably for Morrison Brothers at Geraldine, yet on his personnel record he gives his occupation as butcher for Mr JH Rule, Geraldine. He had already completed five years with the Geraldine Rifle Volunteers, and it was with many of his fellow volunteers that he left New Zealand.

He was among the first to volunteer, being one of the additional men passed and sworn in on the night of 13 August 1914 at Timaru. The next morning, 14 August, they were to fall in at the drill shed at 9.30 and leave Timaru at 1.30 for

the camp at Addington. They were to be photographed prior to leaving.

The Stipendiary Magistrate very kindly sent a big bundle of literature and some packs of playing cards for the use of the troops and another gentleman gave magazines, all of which were appreciated.

Mr TG Towley, dentist, was also thanked for attending to the teeth of the men, free of charge, and doing all that was possible for all those whose teeth required attention. AJ Johnstone's teeth were only fair, but otherwise he was in fit and in good condition.

After being instructed to muster on the Show Grounds on 15 August for final inspection, Anthony James (J Johnstone) actually departed with the mounted men by the slow train from Timaru on 17 August 1914, amidst much excitement in the town; Meanwhile their horses were trucked at the Smithfield siding, Waimataitai. At the Addington concentration camp the men had a strenuous time – physical drill at 6.45am, and a lot of outfitting, overhauling gear, saddler, etc, and generally making things look smart and efficient.

Embarking on 16 October 1914 at Lyttelton, the Canterbury Mounted Rifles men headed for Egypt and reached Alexandria on 3 December. Much of Jim's service was in France where he had gone in April 1916.

On 17 November 1915 he was admitted to hospital; and again on 21 January 1916 at Cairo.

On 13 July 1916 he was admitted to No 1 Australian General Hospital at Rouen, sick, and rejoined his unit 10 days later.

In March 1915 Jim was transferred from trooper to driver. On 12 September 1915 he was appointed lance-corporal; on 23 March 1916 he was promoted to corporal, and on 11 August 1918 promoted to the rank of sergeant. In March 1916 at



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Rouen Jim was appointed baker at No. 1 Field Bakery, which position he relinquished three months later, only to be reappointed the following week for another six weeks. In August 1917 he spent a few days on escort duty, before rejoining the Bakery.

In November 1917 he had two weeks leave in the UK. After his promotion to sergeant he was transferred to the Army Service Corps and attached to the New Zealand Field Ambulance.

Sergeant AJ Johnstone embarked for the return to New Zealand on the "Carpentaria" on 19 May 1919. He took up his abode again at Geraldine and went into a bakery business then took up farming for some years, before moving to the Tuarangi Home at Ashburton and lastly to Christchurch.

He died at Christchurch on 15 July 1959, aged 70 years, and is buried in a serviceman's plot in the Geraldine Cemetery.

Representatives of the Geraldine District Band, former members of the Geraldine Volunteer Fire Brigade, and members of the Geraldine RSA paid their respects at his funeral.

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