

Robert Douglas Lindsay Hamilton

Photo of Robert's service number graffiti in Arras tunnels. Photo credit: Stuart Park of WW1 New Zealand Tunnelling Company on facebook – referenced below – also photo of Robert's grave at Waihi cemetery from WW1 New Zealand Tunnelling Company on facebook.

Hamilton, Robert Douglas L. : Service Number – 37583 : Place of Birth - Tambaroora NSW : Place of Enlistment - Waihi New Zealand : Next of Kin – (Mother) Hamilton, Elizabeth

Hamilton, Robert Douglas Lindsay born 21st Nov 1881 at Tambaroora, father Robert Hamilton, mother Elizabeth Canvin.

Hamilton, Robert Douglas Lindsay married 11th Jan 1911 Mary Grace Richardson at Hillgrove NSW.

Hamilton, Robert Douglas married 17th Apr 1929 Anna Marion Gracey at Te Aroha New Zealand.

Hamilton, Robert Douglas died 25th Mar 1955 at Waihi New Zealand, father Robert Hamilton, mother Elizabeth Kavanagh (actually Canvin).

Hamilton, Robert Douglas died 25th Mar 1955, age 73, at 11 Union St Waihi New Zealand, husband of Anna. Buried at Waihi Serviceman's Cemetery, New Zealand, RSA section, plot 49.

Service No: 37583, Names(in full): Hamilton, Robert Douglas L., Rank/Calling: Sapper, Unit: New Zealand Engineers Tunnelling Company, 4th Reinforcements, Ship Name: HMNZT SS Aparima, Date of Embarkation: 16th Feb 1917, Place of Embarkation: Wellington New Zealand, Age: 32, Trade or Calling: miner, Married or Single: widower, Address at Date of Enrolment: Seddon St, Waihi New Zealand, Next of Kin & Address: mother, Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton, Tambaroora NSW, Religion: Presbyterian, Date of Joining: 28th Sep 1916.

Regimental No: 37583, Last Held Rank: Sapper, Surname & First Names in Full: Hamilton, Robert Douglas L., Last Unit of Service: New Zealand Engineers Tunnelling Company, Date of Enlistment: 28th Sep 1916, Return to New Zealand (Embarkation Date): 14th Mar 1919

Roberts' parents, Robert and Elizabeth Hamilton, were long term residents of Dirt Hole Creek near Tambaroora. Robert snr arrived in the district about 1876 and was married to Elizabeth in 1878 at Golden Gully. He reportedly had considerable experience in alluvial mining on other goldfields before Tambaroora, including Grey River in New Zealand, Araluen and Gulgong in NSW. Elizabeth too, had been at Araluen, in 1876. Robert snr was a trustee of the Sons of Temperance at Tambaroora and also an Orangeman with the Tambaroora Orange Lodge since the 1870s and later at the Hill End Orange Lodge. In 1914 he died in the house that he shared with Elizabeth for thirty six years at Dirt Hole Creek.

Robert was known locally as Lindsay, as evidenced by his name on the Hill End Honour Board and 1906, 1909 electoral rolls, on which he was listed as a miner at Dirt Holes. By 1911 he had left the district for Hillgrove NSW, where he was married to his first wife Mary. She died the following year on 11th September at Te Aroha, Auckland, New Zealand and was buried in Waihi cemetery.

Upon enlistment on 28th September 1916, Robert stated that he was a miner with the Waihi

Gold Mining Company and had been resident in New Zealand for six years. His address at Seddon St, Waihi was near the company's Martha Mine. Recruited for his mining skills, into the New Zealand military engineers tunnelling company, he underwent initial training at Narrow Neck camp at Auckland, until embarkation on 16th Feb 1917 for England, arriving on 2nd May.

Following two months of further training at Christchurch camp in Hampshire, Robert left for France, joining his unit on 13th July 1917, near Arras, in the vicinity of the Arras-Cambrai Rd, to the north of the Scarpe River. At that time the Tunnellers were deployed on a number of tasks, including digging dugouts and underground communication galleries beneath British trenches, as well as construction of roads, observation posts, machine gun and trench mortar emplacements.

The work was difficult and the close proximity of the front line made it very dangerous; just six days after his arrival Robert suffered a gunshot wound to his left hand. After treatment in hospital he returned to duty in early September 1917, in the Arras area. In April 1918 there was opportunity for him to make his mark in the Arras cavern system, when men were sent to re-timber the old cave system, not used since the battle of Arras in 1917. Robert was one of those who left graffiti in the Arras tunnels. In mid-July the Tunnellers departed for Marieux on the Somme.

At the end of August 1918 Robert was granted leave to England, but shortly after re-joining his unit in France in mid-September, was hospitalised for several months until late January 1919. He returned to England in February and was stationed at Sling and Codford camps awaiting return to New Zealand, embarking on 14th Mar 1919.

During the voyage he was hospitalised with jaundice, which is known to be a complication of syphilis, possibly contracted while he was on leave. His unit was the last to arrive back home and was disbanded the day after on the 24th April 1919. Robert was discharged on 22nd May 1919. Curiously he was classified as unfit for military service, due to having defective vision, a condition that he had had for the previous ten years.

Robert returned to Waihi and resumed work as a miner. In 1929 he married his second wife Anna at Te Aroha. Both were residents of Waihi.

On 26th July 1933 he was one of twelve miners involved in mine cage accident, narrowly escaping death when the cage that they were being lowered in, broke loose and plunged 1500 hundred feet down the shaft, coming to rest about 300 feet from the bottom workings. All twelve men were injured, but none critically. Robert later sought compensation and was granted £1656/18/4.

Robert died in 1955, aged 73, at Waihi, from pulmonary tuberculosis and pneumoconiosis, having suffered from both diseases for several years. The latter is an occupational and restrictive lung disease caused by the inhalation of dust, often in mines.

Helen Wood

Hill End and Tambaroora Gathering Group

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With the assistance of Sue Baker Wilson of New Zealand Tunnelling Company on facebook at

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