

## Researching the history of a unit

This guide will help you to find information about a unit (battalion, regiment, squadron, ship) which participated in any of the conflicts in which Australian forces were involved.

If you are researching an individual's war experience, you will need to know the name of the unit/s in which the individual served and the periods during which he or she served in each unit. Individuals often served in more than one unit.

### What online resources are there?

#### Unit profiles

The Memorial's website has brief unit profiles, <http://www.awm.gov.au/units/>. Each includes a short history of the unit, details of its casualties, decorations, battle honours, commanding officers, and, in the case of technical units, the specifications of the equipment it used. Within each profile you are able to search the Memorial's collections for items relating to the unit: photographs, works of art, film and sound recordings, personal records, and relics.

#### Australian Army war diaries

Digitised images of selected original war diaries recording the daily activities of Australian Army units, are available for the following conflicts:

- First World War, <http://www.awm.gov.au/diaries/ww1/>
- Second World War, <http://www.awm.gov.au/diaries/ww2/>
- Korean War, <http://www.awm.gov.au/diaries/korea/>
- South East Asian conflicts, <http://www.awm.gov.au/diaries/seasia/>

Not all the war diaries held by the Memorial are available online. The Memorial has selectively digitised war diaries from its various collections based on preservation needs and high useage. The remaining diaries may be viewed in the Reading Room of the Memorial's Research Centre.

### How do I find out which unit an individual served in?

You will need to obtain a copy of the individual's personal service record, <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/defence/service-records/index.aspx>. This file will provide dates of enlistment, assignment to units, and embarkation overseas.

However, it will provide little information on where individuals served, the type of activities in which they were engaged, or which battles they participated in. The following resources will help provide some of these details.

### Are there any books about the unit?

Published unit histories provide the history of an individual unit during a specific war, or sometimes throughout its existence. Frequently they contain information related to the unit, such as nominal rolls, rolls of honour, or lists of honours and awards. Search for published unit histories, <http://www.awm.gov.au/firstopac/>. If your library does not have a copy of the unit history, ask there for an inter-library loan.

Official histories of Australia's involvement in conflicts are the most authoritative published sources for the history of Australia's participation in war. Official histories are written mainly from primary (i.e. original) sources. Units are mentioned where they play a part in the overall proceedings. The official histories of the First World War and Second World War have been digitised and are available at <http://www.awm.gov.au/histories/>.

## What official records exist for the unit?

The Australian War Memorial and the National Archives of Australia hold records created by agencies such as the Australian Army, Navy and Air Force, Department of Defence, and other government departments during periods of conflict.

The official records collections of the Memorial and National Archives are listed on RecordSearch, <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/recordsearch.aspx>. For information about searching RecordSearch please see the fact sheet Searching for records, <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs09.aspx>.

The most useful groups of official records in the Australian War Memorial for researching a unit's history are:

- War diaries, <http://www.awm.gov.au/diaries/>  
These are created by the unit during the war and record daily activities, events, and orders.
- Manuscript unit histories – The Research Centre holds several hundred unpublished unit histories of varying lengths; many are in Official records series AWM224.
- Reports of proceedings (ROPs) - Known earlier as “Letters of Proceedings”, are summaries of a ship's or shore base's activities. ROPs are held in the Official records series AWM78
- RAAF Formation and Unit records (AWM64) - Were kept to record operations and activities of RAAF units. The records are available for viewing on microfilm in the Research Centre. The original records have been withdrawn from public access due to their fragile nature. Original records are only issued when no microfilm copy is available.

Please note that all official records held by the Australian War Memorial have a series number that begins with AWM and has the location listed as Australian War Memorial. All other items are held by the National Archives of Australia.

Once you have identified the records you wish to view, you can visit the Research Centre at the Memorial to read them. We strongly recommend that you contact the Research Centre prior to your visit to ensure the material will be available.

## Where can I look for photographs?

- Collections search, <http://www.awm.gov.au/database/collection.asp>  
Access to images of photographs, works of art, and some memorabilia held by the Memorial, as well as lists of films and sound recordings.
- Picture Australia, <http://www.awm.gov.au>  
Images held by a range of major Australian libraries, archives and other cultural institutions.
- State libraries and archives, [http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/addresses\\_aust.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/addresses_aust.asp)

## Where else can I find out about units?

- Private records  
Diaries, letters and other papers written or collected by individuals or organisations are held by the Memorial, the National Library, and other state libraries and archives. Search the Collections Search, <http://www.awm.gov.au/database/collection.asp>, using keywords for name of unit.
- Websites  
Many units, especially for RAAF squadrons and those units who served in the Vietnam War, have their own websites. These websites can be located by searching the internet.
- Veterans' associations  
Associations related to many specific units exist. For addresses, contact the Returned and Services League of Australia, <http://www.rsl.org.au/>.