

Researching Australian military service

Introduction

This is a general outline of how to find out about an individual's life while serving with the Australian defence forces during conflicts in which Australia was involved. See also the information under the specific conflict, such as First World War.

Where to begin

First you should gather evidence about the individual to establish

- Full name
- service number
- unit in which he/she served.

We suggest that you:

1. ask for information from family members or other local sources
2. check the Biographical Databases available on the Memorial's website
<http://www.awm.gov.au/database/biographical.asp>
3. then, if necessary, ask the Research Centre staff for assistance.

This should give you sufficient information to obtain a copy of the personal service record which provides the vital information for further research.

Personal service records (dossiers)

Personal service records are files created for individuals during their military careers. The contents and detail of service records vary in quality and amount from conflict to conflict. For most servicemen and women, this will be the only official documentation for them as individuals.

Typically service records contain information about the individual on enlistment, assignment to units, details of embarkations, promotions, medical treatment, official correspondence and medal entitlements.

Service records are held in the country of the force with whom your individual served, for example, Royal Australian Air Force records are held in Australia and Royal Air Force records are held in the United Kingdom.

Applying for copies of service records

Copies of records of service in Australian forces can be obtained from the National Archives of Australia, <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/defence/service-records/index.aspx>.

The information sheet Records of service in forces of other countries [<http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/overseaspsr.asp>] has contact details for overseas archives and other institutions in relation to Australians who served in forces of other countries.

Those who died while serving

The Roll of Honour, <http://www.awm.gov.au/roh/>, records the names of service men and women who died during or as a result of service with Australian military forces. The Roll of Honour introduction provides detailed information about Roll of Honour eligibility, <http://www.awm.gov.au/roh/>.

The Commemorative Roll, <http://www.awm.gov.au/croll/>, commemorates Australians who died during or as a result of wars or warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service but who were not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour. The Commemorative Roll

introduction provides detailed information about Commemorative Roll eligibility, <http://www.awm.gov.au/croll/intro.asp>.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Debt of Honour Register, http://www.cwgc.org/debt_of_honour.asp, lists all British Commonwealth soldiers who died in the First and Second World wars only. It also provides details on the individuals' burial or commemoration sites.

For further information about burial or commemoration sites, contact:
Office of Australian War Graves
PO Box 21
Woden ACT 2606

Phone: 1800 026 185
Fax: (02) 6289 4861
Email: WarGraves@dva.gov.au
Website: <http://www.dva.gov.au/commem/oawg/wargr.htm>

Where they served

Personal service records only provide basic events and dates. Unit histories and records provide the context of the individual's service. For more information see the information sheet Researching the history of a unit, http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/unit_history.asp.

Medals awarded

See the information sheets

- Campaign and service medals, <http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/medals.asp>
- Military honours and awards to Australians, http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/honours_awards.asp

Where to look for photographs

- Collections Search, <http://www.awm.gov.au/database/collection.asp>, gives access to images held by the Memorial.
- Picture Australia, <http://www.pictureaustralia.org/>, has images held by a range of major Australian libraries, archives and other cultural institutions.
- PhotoSearch, <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/PhotoSearchStartup.asp>, allows you to search and browse the titles of almost 500,000 photographs from collection of the National Archives of Australia. You can view 80,000 images online.
- State libraries and archival repositories, http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/addresses_aust.asp, may have photographs in their collections.

Courts martial

Existing records of courts martial from 1901 for all services are held by the National Archives of Australia (National Office, Canberra). Use RecordSearch, <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/recordsearch.aspx>, to find information on courts martial. In most cases, the individuals name is part of the file title.