

Researching Australian military service: Second World War, Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS)

The Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) was formed in August 1941 to release men from some military duties to serve with fighting units. Women worked in traditional roles such as clerks, typists and cooks. They were also employed as drivers, signallers, and provosts in areas such as intelligence, chemical trials, electrical and chemical engineering, and ordnance.

Second World War Nominal Roll

The Department of Veterans' Affairs World War 2 Nominal Roll [nominal-rolls.dva.gov.au/ww2] includes the names of those who served with the AWAS. It provides some basic service details.

Personal service records

To locate personal service records, use RecordSearch [www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/]. Go to NameSearch, enter the family name and select the category "World War II". If you get a large number of results you can refine the search by adding a first name.

You can apply to the National Archives of Australia for a copy of the service record. For more information, go to Army – World War II service records [www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/defence/service-records/army-wwii.aspx].

Those who died while serving

The Roll of Honour [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people?roll=Roll%20of%20Honour/] records the names of servicemen and servicewomen 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 [<https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/honour-rolls/roll-of-honour/>].

Where they served

To locate where an individual served you need to examine records of the unit with whom the individual was serving. The personal service records will indicate the units and dates relevant for the individual's service. For further guidance please refer to our research guide, Researching the history of a unit [www.awm.gov.au/research/guide/unit-history/].

Medals and awards

Please refer to our research guides:

- Campaign and service medals [www.awm.gov.au/research/guide/campaign-medals/]
- Australian military honours and awards [www.awm.gov.au/research/guide/honours/]

Where to look for photographs, film, sound and private records

- Collections Search [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/] gives access to images of photographs, private records, sound recordings and transcripts, and film held by the Memorial. The sound collection includes a series of oral history interviews of AWAS personnel. Search by individual

names or to retrieve all items search "Australian Women's Army Service" (include the double quotes to limit the results specifically to AWAS items).

- Trove [trove.nla.gov.au] includes a range of formats including photographs, film, sound and private records held by a range of major Australian libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions. It also includes a collection of digitised historic newspapers.
- Second World War personal service records may contain a photograph.

Other sources of information

- Australian Women's Register [www.womenaustralia.info/]
- Australian Dictionary of biography online [adb.anu.edu.au/]

General Information

Official Records

Official Records relating to the AWAS can be located using the RecordSearch database. Search the database using "Australian Women's Army Service" in the keyword search box to locate relevant material. Official Records held at the Memorial include "History of the AWAS, 1947", **AWM54 88/1/1**.

Unit war diaries were kept by the commanding officer of a unit to record daily activities and location. Some AWAS unit diaries may be viewed online as part of the Memorial's program to digitise headquarters and infantry units' diaries from the Second World War [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1359733]. AWAS unit diaries that have not been digitised are available in the Research Centre. War diaries held in the Research Centre are listed on RecordSearch.

For more information about searching RecordSearch please see the National Archives of Australia fact sheet, Searching for records [www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs09.aspx].

Books

Use the Memorial's [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search?query=&library=true] Collection search, enter "Australian Women's Army Service" to retrieve books relating to the AWAS history in general as well as individual memoirs.

Some recommended books include:

- Jean Beveridge, *AWAS: Women making history* (Chevron Island, Qld: Boolarong Publications for AWAS Lae Contingent, 1988) A good resource for researching women who went to New Guinea; includes a nominal roll of New Guinea contingent.
- Lorna Oliff, *Women in khaki* (Sydney: Ollif Publishing Company, 1981) A useful general history.
- Lorna Staub Staude, *Memoirs of an AWAS Driver* (Naracoorte: Naracoorte Herald, 1989)
- Ann Howard, *You'll be sorry! Reflections of the AWAS from 1941—1945* (Dangar Island: Tarka Publishing, 1990) An AWAS history using interviews and associated quotes, this book presents first-hand experiences of numerous women.