

Researching Australian military service: Second World War, 1939-1945

Overview

Australian military history overview: Second World War, 1939-1945 [www.awm.gov.au/articles/second-world-war]

Nominal rolls

- **Second World War nominal roll:** details of over a million people who served in Australia's defence forces and the Merchant Navy, recorded as an index that provides a 'snapshot' of individual service gathered from service records [nominal-rolls.dva.gov.au/ww2]
- **Unit Histories:** Some published unit histories provide lists of names of their members, usually with service numbers. You can identify if there is a published unit history for your individual unit by searching the Library database [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search?query=&library=true]. Search using the name of the unit and the date range as keywords, for example "2/2 Battalion 1939–1945".

Personal service records

Service records contain information about an individual on enlistment and throughout their military service.

Second World War service records are held by the National Archives of Australia and have been digitised so may be viewed online. Select *RecordSearch* on the Archives to locate Service Records from the Second World War [www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/defence-and-war-service-records].

If a soldier saw service in both the First and the Second World Wars, the record has usually been amalgamated into their Second World War service record. Use the same link above to locate these records.

Those who died while serving

The **Roll of Honour** [https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people?roll=Roll%20of%20Honour&facet_related_conflict_sort=10%3ASecond%20World%20War%2C%201939-1945] records the names of servicemen and servicewomen who died during or as a result of service with Australian military forces.

The **Commemorative Roll** [https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people?roll=Commemorative%20Roll&facet_related_conflict_sort=10%3ASecond%20World%20War%2C%201939-1945] 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.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission [www.cwgc.org] casualty database lists all British Commonwealth soldiers who died in the First and Second World Wars. The register provides details about where the individual is buried or commemorated, including plans and photographs of the cemetery or memorial.

Details of circumstances of deaths or wounding

It can be difficult to locate detailed information about how someone was wounded or killed during their service. Sources that may help include:

- **Second World War POWs and Missing Persons:** displays the digitised AWM232 series files for over 23,000 Australian Military Forces prisoners of war and missing personnel from operations in the Far East and South West Pacific Islands, as of 30 June 1944 [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people?roll=Second%20World%20War%20POWs%20and%20Missing%20Persons]
- **University of Melbourne Archives: Missing, Wounded and POW Enquiry Cards:** Comprises 60,699 cards

used by the Central Bureau for Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War of the Australian Red Cross to trace the welfare and whereabouts of members of the armed forces, and some civilians, during the Second World War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War [archives.library.unimelb.edu.au/nodes/view/71317]

- Published unit histories and unit war diaries may provide information on location and general circumstances of the unit on the date of death.

Where they served

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

- **Australian Army Unit war diaries:** maintained by units on operations, these diaries contain detailed information on the activities in which a unit was engaged on a given date [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1359733]. Those war diaries that have not been digitised are available in the Research Centre.
- **Royal Australian Navy Reports of Proceedings:** summaries of a ship's or shore base's activities. Search for relevant ROPs using the RecordSearch's Advanced Search [www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection]. These records are available for viewing in the Research Centre. The Memorial is progressively digitising its collection of ROPs, many of which are now available for viewing online [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/navy-reports]
- **Royal Australian Air Force formation and unit records:** a record of operations and activities of RAAF units. The records are available for viewing on microfilm in the Research Centre. The National Archives of Australia has a duplicate series A9186, many records of which have been digitised and are available online through the RecordSearch database. The Memorial is progressively digitising its collection, many of which are now available for viewing online [www.awm.gov.au/collection/official-histories-rolls-unit-diaries/raaf-formation]

Medals and awards

- Honours and Awards database: please note that not all those recommended for an award received one. [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people?people_roll_type=both&roll=Honours+and+Awards]
- Research guide Campaign and service medals [www.awm.gov.au/research/guide/campaign-medals]
- Research guide Australian military honours and awards [www.awm.gov.au/research/guide/honours]

Where to look for photographs

- Collection Search [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search] allows you to search and view photographs held by the Memorial
- PhotoSearch is the online photographic catalogue of the National Archives of Australia and contains digital images of photographs from the collections in all state and territory offices of the archives. Accessed via [recordsearch.naa.gov.au]
- Trove [trove.nla.gov.au/] includes photographs and other images held by a range of major Australian libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions.
- Second World War personal service records may contain a photograph [www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/defence/service-records/army-wwii.aspx]

Other resources

- **Second World War official histories:** Official histories are a detailed chronological record of all services and all theatres of conflict. The official history for the Second World War, Australia in the War of 1939–1945, has been digitised and is available for viewing on the Memorial's web site [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1417143]
- **Virtual War Memorial Australia** is a commemorative collection, purpose built to honour the personal experiences of all those who have served the nation in times of conflict, from the Boer War through to Afghanistan [vwma.org.au/]