

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.

Identifying the unit(s)

You will need to obtain a copy of the individual's personal service record [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 there is 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.

Online resources

Unit profiles

The Memorial's website has brief unit profiles that can include 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. Search units [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search?query=&units=true].

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 [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1338583]
- Second World War [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1359733]
- Korean War [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/unit-diaries]
- South East Asian conflicts [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1372714]

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 usage. The remaining diaries may be viewed in the Reading Room of the Memorial's Research Centre [www.awm.gov.au/collection/research-at-the-memorial].

Report of Proceedings, HMA Ships and Establishments (ROPs)

ROPs are the official record of activities of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). They were submitted by commanding officers to the Navy Office either monthly or quarterly in both wartime and peacetime. Digitised ROPs can be viewed on the website [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/navy-reports] or original records may be viewed in the Reading Room of the Memorial's Research Centre [www.awm.gov.au/collection/research-at-the-memorial].

Official histories

The official histories of the First World War and Second World War have been digitised and are available on the Memorial's website [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/official-histories].

Books

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 on the Memorial's Books database [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search?query=&library=true]. If your library does not have a copy of the unit history, ask about 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. Details of the volumes comprising the Official Histories series are listed on the Memorial's website [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/official-histories]. Digitised images of the official histories of the First World War and Second World War are available online [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/unit-diaries].

Official records

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 [www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/]. For information about searching RecordSearch please see the fact sheet Searching for records [www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs09.aspx].

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

- **War diaries** – These are created by the unit during active service and record daily activities, events, and orders [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/unit-diaries]
- **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”, ROPs are summaries of a ship's or shore base's activities. ROPs are held in the Official records series **AWM78** [www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-history/navy-reports].
- **RAAF Formation and Unit records (AWM64)** - document 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 [www.awm.gov.au/collection/research-at-the-memorial] at the Memorial to read them. We strongly recommend that you contact the Research Centre [www.awm.gov.au/request/forms/] prior to your visit to ensure the material will be available.

Other sources of information

- **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 [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search using keywords for name of unit.
- **Websites:** Many units, especially RAAF squadrons and those units which 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 [www.rsl.org.au/].