Second World War, Merchant Navy

The term "Merchant Navy" refers to a nation's commercial shipping and crews. During the Second World War, merchant vessels were commissioned into naval service as hospital ships, supply ships and armed merchant cruisers.

Those who served

Nominal roll

The Department of Veterans' Affairs' World War 2 Nominal Roll [www.ww2roll.gov.au] includes the men and women who served in Australia's Merchant Navy.

Service records

The National Archives of Australia holds microfilmed employment records for Australian seamen who served on Australian merchant vessels between January 1922 and December 1990. The records are arranged by family name and give some personal information, the name of ships and dates of service.


Those who died while serving

The Commemorative Roll [www.awm.gov.au/research/people/commemorative_roll/] includes the names of those Australians who in other respects would qualify as eligible for the Roll of Honour, but who were members of the Merchant Navy. Records in the Commemorative Roll contain the personal particulars, unit and the date of death of each person. Some records may contain cemetery or memorial details and next of kin.

Where they served

Official Records

- AWM54 963/ Transport - Sea (Allied) - Reports on Voyage
- AWM88, M/N 1-13 Merchant Navy-M/N 23 Merchant Navy (plus others, search using merchant navy keywords)
- AWM188 52 History of RAN Schools, including Merchant Navy Courses
- AWM237 80 Australian Merchant Navy deaths, 1939-45 War

Books

- Alex Marcus, “DEMS? What's DEMS?: the story of the men of the Royal Australian Navy who manned defensively equipped merchant ships during World War II (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1986) AWM call number: R 940.545994 M322d
- Baron Edward Evans Mountevans and Huddart Parker Limited, War service of the Merchant Navy: a record of the participation of the men and ships of Huddart Parker Ltd (Melbourne: [Huddart Parker Ltd.], 1951) AWM call number: F 940.545994 W253
- Merchant navy defence courses: general information ([Melbourne?: s.n., between 1939 and 1940]
Online

- Royal Australian Navy History, WWII Merchant ship movement records – Australia [http://117.55.225.121/Publication:AWWII_Mercant_Ship_Papers]

Background information

- Don Fraser, “Men of a service’: Australian merchant seamen”, Wartime 5 (1999): 53-57
- Morris Ochert, An Australian’s perspective on the merchant navy in World War II ([Brisbane]: Morris Ochert, 2001) AWM call number 940.545994 O16a

Additional background material can be found on Trove, the National Library of Australia’s discovery database [trove.nla.gov.au].

Photographs

- Collections Search [www.awm.gov.au/search/collections/] gives access to images of photographs held by the Memorial
- PhotoSearch [www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/] 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.
- Trove [trove.nla.gov.au] can search photographs and other images held by a range of major Australian libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions
- State libraries and archives, see our information sheet Addresses [www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/addresses_aust/]

Merchant Navy records for other countries

Canada
Library and Archives Canada
Canadian Genealogy Centre: Merchant Marine [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/genealogy/022-913.006-e.html]

New Zealand

United Kingdom
The National Archives, UK
Looking for a person: Merchant Navy [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/default.htm]

United States
American Merchant Marine at war: records and contact information [www.usmm.org/contact.html]