



Tracing Army Ancestry

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide guidance on tracing Army personnel. More detailed information can be found in our publication *Tracing your Family History: Army* – this can be purchased from the Imperial War Museum for £5.50. The Museum does not hold any personal service records or official documentation, but can help the enquirer as long as some basic facts are known. The Department of Printed Books welcomes visitors by appointment and is able to provide useful reading material and advice for finding out more about those who served. Other reference departments in the Museum - Art, Documents, Exhibits and Firearms, Film and Photograph Archives, and the Sound Archive - may also be able to assist.

Department of Printed Books, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ

Tel: (+44) 020 7416 5342

Fax: (+44) 020 7416 5246

Website: www.iwm.org.uk

Email: books@iwm.org.uk

Where to Find Army Service Records

The most important piece of information is the unit that an individual served with (it is a sad fact that those who died during the World Wars will be easier to trace than those who survived, and this information is readily obtainable from the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**). The personal service record should be the starting point, but not all of these records for the First World War survived Second World War bombing. Records are located according to an individual's date of discharge.

The Imperial War Museum only covers the period from the First World War onwards. Military history from 1485 to date is covered by the **National Army Museum, Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London SW3 4HT (Tel: 020 7730 0717; Website: www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)**. Pre-1914 service records are held at **The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU (Tel: 020 8392 5200; Website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)**. The National Archives (TNA), formerly Public Record Office, also holds all surviving First World War service records for officers who left the Army before 1922. Surviving First World War service records for other ranks who ceased service before 1920 are now held at the TNA where they can be consulted on microfilm (unfortunately large numbers of these were destroyed by bombing in the Second World War). The publication *Army Service Records of the First World War* by William Spencer, 3rd edition, (Richmond, Surrey: PRO, 2001) is essential reading for those interested in First World War records, and *Army Records for Family Historians* by Simon Fowler and William Spencer, 2nd edition, (Richmond, Surrey: PRO, 1998) will also prove helpful.

The records of any First World War soldier who saw service after these cut-off dates or who rejoined the Army are held by the Ministry of Defence. These can be applied for by post from **Army Personnel Centre, Disclosures 4, MP 400, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow G2 8EX**. Initial contact with the Army Personnel Centre (APC) can be made by telephone (**0845 600 9963**) or e-mail – please include

your postal address (apc_historical_disclosures@btconnect.com). Records will be released to proven next of kin for a £30 fee, but there may be a lengthy wait for this service.

The Brigade of Guards form an exception to this as records for other ranks (officers' records are held by TNA/APC) are held by the **Regimental Headquarters Grenadier/Coldstream/Scots/Irish/Welsh Guards, Wellington Barracks, Birdcage Walk, London SW1E 6HQ**. Household Cavalry records are held at TNA but are also accessible on microfiche at the **Household Cavalry Museum, Combermere Barracks, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 3DN** (Website: www.householdcavalry.co.uk).

The careers of Army officers can be traced using the regular official publication the **Army List**, and the Department of Printed Books holds an almost complete set of these from 1914 to date.

Casualty Records

The **Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7DX (Tel: 01628 507200)** has details of all service personnel who died between the dates 4 August 1914-31 August 1921 and 3 September 1939-31 December 1947. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) may charge a fee for postal enquiries, but the website containing their computerised database, **Debt of Honour** can be consulted at www.cwgc.org.

Details of service personnel buried in 'non-World War' graves are available from the **Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (JPAC), Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, Building 182, RAF Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW**. Please mark your enquiry 'Memorials and Graves'.

Sources held by the Department of Printed Books (DPB) include a complete set of the CWGC's memorial and cemetery registers and the 80 volume **Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-19**. This was originally published in 1921 by HMSO but was republished by J.B. Hayward in 1989. It is also now available on a CD-ROM produced by Naval and Military Press. **Officers Died in the Great War, 1914-19** is less detailed and has probably been superseded by **Officers Who Died in the Service of British, Indian and East African Regiments and Corps, 1914-1919** by S.D. and D.B. Jarvis (Reading: Roberts Medals, 1993).

A CD-ROM for Army personnel who died in the Second World War has also been produced by Naval and Military Press, and can be consulted in our Reading Room. Rolls of honour for other later conflicts are also held, and in addition the DPB has a large collection of published rolls of honour for localities, schools, institutions, etc. Regimental histories and journals often contain rolls of honour.

The soldiers' own home area should not be forgotten when researching an individual's service - there may be local war memorial records, a local account of war service may have been published, and contemporary local newspapers can prove very helpful. It is also possible that school, church or workplace records may still exist.

Medal Records

Campaign medals are those given to soldiers who are eligible for them because they were in a particular theatre of war within given dates. The First World War Medal Roll which provides a listing of all those who qualified for the 1914 Star,

1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Territorial Force War Medal and/or the Silver War Badge is held at TNA. If a First World War record was destroyed some basic information about a soldier's service may be found in this.

Gallantry medals are those medals awarded for an especially heroic deed or action. Records for these are held at TNA, but may not be very detailed. Notifications and citations (if published, which was not the case for awards such as the Military Medal and Mentions in Despatches) appeared in the official journal **London Gazette**. A complete set of this, and the all important indexes, is held at TNA. **The London Gazette Online Archive** at www.gazettes-online.co.uk provides access to First and Second World War entries. The DPB has some published listings of medal awards for decorations such as the Victoria Cross and Distinguished Conduct Medal. Usually you will need to go either to the official unit war diary (held at TNA) or to a published unit history to see whether you can find out more about the action for which the decoration was awarded.

Regimental Histories

The DPB has an excellent collection of regimental histories. For those unable to visit our Reading Room (open 10am-5pm, Monday to Saturday), ***A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*** compiled by Arthur S. White (London: London Stamp Exchange, 1988) provides details of published histories that may be available through your local library's inter-library loan scheme. Regimental journals and forces newspapers should not be overlooked.

A useful title for locating regimental museums (although these are unlikely to hold information about individuals) is ***A Guide to Military Museums: and Other Places of Military Interest*** by Terence and Shirley Wise (Knighton, Powys: Terence Wise, 2001).

We can also advise on the addresses of Old Comrades Associations. The internet has made it easier to establish contact with people who may have served in the Forces, or who may be conducting research similar to your own. The British Legion website at www.britishlegion.org.uk is a good place to start. An excellent site for First World War Orders of Battle and Army information is www.1914-1918.net. Other websites of interest include The Western Front Association at www.westernfront.co.uk and Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth at www.regiments.org.