

National Army Museum Information Sheet 4: Soldiers' Records 1920–Present



Introduction

There are a number of different places where you can find information on soldiers who served in the British Army after the First World War. This guide is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply to help you to start in the right place.

After 1918, the British Army reverted back to a smaller professional, volunteer army, supported by part-time Territorials. With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and the re-introduction of conscription, once again the Army grew massively. Many records for the post 1920 period are still considered to be personally sensitive and may be restricted.

Research at the National Army Museum: the Templer Study Centre (TSC)

Researchers who wish to view material held by the National Army Museum may do so in the Templer Study Centre (www.nam.ac.uk/tsc). This contains one of the largest collections of books and archives relating to the British Army in this country, including all the published works mentioned in this leaflet. The TSC is open from 10.00am to 5.00pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and the first and third Saturdays of each month. It is closed from Sunday to Tuesday. If you do not already hold a Reader's Ticket, please bring with you some form of identification which has a photograph and your name and address on it, such as a driving licence card, or a passport with an additional utility bill as proof of address.

Service Records: All Personnel

The Service Records of personnel who served at any time after 1920, are held by the Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow (see Useful Addresses). Information from the personal record of a deceased ex-serviceman/woman can be released only with the consent of the official next of kin, and unless the person died in service, proof of death. Living ex-service personnel can enquire about their own records, however. A research fee (currently £30) is charged. Further advice can be gained from a free Veterans Helpline: 0800 169 22 77.

Other Records: Officers

A basic source of information about the career of a commissioned officer is the *Army List*, published monthly and quarterly. The Templer Study Centre holds a virtually complete run of these.

The *Army List* will tell you the name of the regiment in which an officer served, and the dates of his various promotions. From this information you can construct a broad outline of his military career. Promotions, resignations, and changes of regiment were also published in the War Office sections of the *London Gazette*. The TSC holds un-indexed copies of these from the period 1939–1945 and the pre and post-war period.

Other Records: NCOs and Other Ranks

Few other records are available for non-officers, other than those held at Glasgow. Senior NCOs do also appear in some inter-war *Army Lists*.

Casualties

As with the dead of the First World War, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) is responsible for the recording and care of Commonwealth dead of the Second World War. A searchable database of war dead can be found on their website at www.cwgc.org/.

The National Archives also holds an Army Roll of Honour under WO 304. A searchable database of this can be found on their website and the roll has also been published by Naval and Military Press, both in digital and printed formats.

Prisoners of War of all ranks taken by the Germans are nominally listed in *Prisoners of War: British Army, 1939–1945*, London (1990). These lists are also available at the National Archives online under WO 392. Index Cards are also held under WO 345 of those taken by the Japanese.

Medals and Awards

Citations for Gallantry Awards to Army personnel are contained within WO 373. This is available to search and download online at the National Archives, and the TSC also has microfilm copies. Enquiries about un-issued Campaign Medals and other matters should be made to the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (See Useful Addresses).

Gallantry awards can be found in the *London Gazette*, however few citations were included.

Going further: researching a soldier's regiment

For those who wish to dig deeper into a soldier's career, the next step is to study a published history of his regiment. The TSC holds a substantial number of regimental histories for this period.

The National Archives holds the original War Diaries of units kept during the Second World War under the classes WO 166 to WO 177 and these are arranged by Theatre of War. These give basic details of daily activities, but seldom mention ordinary soldiers by name.

The TSC also holds a large collection of post-1945 regimental histories as well as regimental periodicals, although some of the latter ceased

publication between 1939–1945. They can provide some information about the operational activities of a regiment, but were subject to censorship during wartime and mainly concentrate on peacetime activities.

Regimental Collections at the National Army Museum

The NAM also holds several former regimental museum collections in its archives. These include the Middlesex Regiment, the Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) and Women's Royal Army Corps. The NAM also holds enlistment and discharge books of the period 1919 to 1945 for the Middlesex and Buffs Regiments and similar records for the Irish regiments disbanded in 1922 (Royal Irish Regiment, Connaught Rangers, Leinster Regiment, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Royal Munster Fusiliers).

Regimental Museums

Regimental Museums may hold interesting background information on the battalion or regiment in which you are interested, but they are unlikely to have detailed information on individual soldiers. An essential guide to regimental museums is *The AMOT Guide to Military Museums*, London (2007). Information is also available at www.armymuseums.org.uk.

Soldiers' Effects Records

The National Army Museum holds an extensive set of records relating to monies paid to the named relatives of deceased soldiers and those discharged insane during this period. They do not give details of the personal possessions of dead personnel. These are not currently available in the TSC, but a transcript is available for a charge of £10.25 per soldier from the Department of Archives, Photographs, Film and Sound. The charge is levied as they are stored off site from the main museum.

Local Newspapers

Local newspapers reported the events of the Second World War extensively, although they were subject to censorship. They also sometimes published lists of local people killed, wounded, taken prisoner or decorated for bravery. Local History Libraries may hold copies of local newspapers; the British Library newspaper collection holds an extensive collection of newspapers for this period.

Other Useful Books

William Spencer, *Army Records: A guide for Family Historians*, Kew (2007)

William Spencer, *Family History in the Wars: How your ancestors served their country*, Kew (2008)

A S White, *A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*, London (1988).

Ian S Hallows, *Regiments and Corps of the British Army*, London (1991)

Army Museums Ogilby Trust, *The AMOT Guide to Military Museums*, London (2007).

Useful Addresses

The National Archives,
Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU
Tel +44 (0) 20 8876 3444
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Army Personnel Centre, HQ Secretariat, Historical Disclosures, Mail Point 400, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow, G2 8EX
Tel: 0845 600 9663, option 1, then option 3

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (Joint Personnel Administration Centre),
MOD Medal Office, Building 250, RAF Innsworth, Gloucester, GL3 1HW
JPAC Enquiry Centre: Tel: 0141 224 3600
Veterans Freephone: 0800 085 3600

Commonwealth War Grave Commission,
2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7DX
www.cwgc.org
Tel: 01628 507200

British Library Newspapers, Colindale Avenue,
London NW9 5HE
www.bl.uk/collections/newspapers.html

Other Useful Websites

Veterans UK Website
www.veterans-uk.info/index.html

Defence Medal Office
www.army.mod.uk/contacts/divisions/medals.html

Army Museums Ogilby Trust
www.armymuseums.org.uk

Lost military friends and colleagues can sometimes be found through www.servicepals.com

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