

## *Family History Notes from the Imperial War Museum*

### **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 is currently out of print, but copies can be viewed in the Explore History Centre. 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 Collections Division welcomes visitors by appointment and is able to provide useful reading material and advice for finding out more about those who served. Other types of material - art, documents, three-dimensional objects, film, photographs and sound recordings - may also be able to assist.

Collections Enquiry Service, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ

Tel: (+44) 020 7416 5342

Fax: (+44) 020 7416 5246

Website: [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)

Email: [collections@iwm.org.uk](mailto:collections@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 many of these were lost or damaged by bombing in 1940. 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. The **National Army Museum, Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London SW3 4HT** (Tel: 020 7730 0717; Website: [www.national-army-museum.ac.uk](http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)) has information on military history from 1485 to date. Pre-1914 service records are held at **The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU** (Tel: 020 8876 3444; Website: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://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 (unfortunately large numbers of these were destroyed by bombing in the Second World War). These can now be accessed online through the subscription based website [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk). The publication ***First World War Army Service Records*** by William Spencer, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Richmond, Surrey: The National Archives, 2008) is essential reading for those interested in First World War records, and you can find many useful research guides on the website.

The records of any First World War soldier who saw service after the cut-off dates detailed above or who rejoined the Army are held by the Ministry of Defence. These can be applied for by post from the **Army Personnel Centre, Disclosures 4, MP 555, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow G2 8EX**. Initial contact with the Army Personnel Centre (APC) can be made by telephone (**0845 600 9663**) or email – please include your postal address ([disc4.civsec@apc.army.mod.uk](mailto:disc4.civsec@apc.army.mod.uk)). Records will be released to proven next of kin for a £30 fee, although there may be a lengthy wait for this service. You can find a copy of the application form on the Veterans UK website at: [www.veterans-uk.info/service\\_records/service\\_records.html](http://www.veterans-uk.info/service_records/service_records.html)

Second World War and later records are also obtainable through the APC, as are Home Guard records (although these are usually brief and contain very few details).

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.**

The careers of Army officers can be traced using the regular official publication the **Army List**, and the Imperial War Museum (IWM) holds an almost complete set of these from 1914 to 2007, when it ceased to be published in hard copy.

### **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](http://www.cwgc.org)

The new Armed Forces Memorial website has a roll of honour that allows you to search for Army personnel who died after 1948. This can be found at [www.veterans-uk.info/amf2/index.php](http://www.veterans-uk.info/amf2/index.php)

Details of service personnel buried in 'non-World War' graves are available from the **Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW.** Please mark your enquiry 'Graves Casework'.

Sources held by the IWM 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 JB Hayward in 1989. This and the less detailed **Officers Died in the Great War, 1914-19** (published in 1919) are available on a CD-ROM produced by Naval and Military Press, and also a pay per view basis on the website [www.military-genealogy.com](http://www.military-genealogy.com) (this can also be accessed via the family history pages at [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)).

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 the Explore History Centre. This information is also available through [www.military-genealogy.com](http://www.military-genealogy.com) Rolls of honour for other later conflicts are also held, and in addition the IWM has a large collection of published rolls of honour for localities, schools, institutions, etc. Regimental histories and magazines often contain rolls of honour. Some rolls of honour can be found online at [www.roll-of-honour.com](http://www.roll-of-honour.com)

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.

The United Kingdom National Inventory of War Memorials is recording details of all war memorials in the country. More information about this project can be found at [www.ukniwm.org.uk](http://www.ukniwm.org.uk)

## 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. The index cards can now be accessed on the internet at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline) These cards are an index to the medal rolls – these can be consulted at TNA, and may yield additional information.

You can also access these cards online at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) – this shows both the front and back of the cards (the reverse may contain additional details).

Post First World War medal claims or enquiries can be addressed to: **Ministry of Defence Medal Office, Building 250, Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW.**

**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.london-gazette.co.uk](http://www.london-gazette.co.uk) provides access to First and Second World War entries. The IWM 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. Local newspapers may also have reported medal awards. Recommendations for Honours and Awards, 1935-1990, are now available online at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline)

## Regimental Histories

The IWM has an excellent collection of regimental histories. For those unable to visit in person, *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 magazines and forces newspapers should not be overlooked. *Soldier* magazine was first published in 1945, and continues to be an excellent source of information about military life. Some articles from past and present issues can be found on the website at [www.soldiermagazine.co.uk](http://www.soldiermagazine.co.uk)

TNA has copies of the official unit war diaries – some of these for the First World War and Army of Occupation are now available online at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline)

A useful title for locating regimental museums (although these are unlikely to hold information about individuals) is *Military Museums in the UK* produced by the Army Museums Ogilby Trust (Third Millennium Publishing, 2007). You can also find contact details at [www.armymuseums.org.uk](http://www.armymuseums.org.uk)

The IWM Collections Enquiry Service 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 Royal British Legion website at [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk) is a good place to start. The Army website at [www.army.mod.uk](http://www.army.mod.uk) is also useful. An excellent site for First World War Orders of Battle and Army information is [www.1914-1918.net](http://www.1914-1918.net) The Western Front Association at [www.westernfrontassociation.com](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com) is also recommended. The Second World War is not as well covered on the internet, but one useful site is [www.unithistories.com](http://www.unithistories.com)

04/10