

# Military Research after 1945

The purpose of this guide is to provide some useful sources and addresses to enable you to find out more about the service of your relative in the armed forces after the Second World War. For reasons of space we cannot list every available source and this can only serve as a basis for further research. There are several books available which cover military research in more depth – check with your local library or book shop.

The first step in your research is to speak to your relatives. If your relative is still living, then first-hand information can often be the simplest and easiest way to find out what you want to know. Do remember that depending on how long ago their service was, their memory may no longer be reliable. You should also beware of someone embellishing a tale for dramatic effect! However, in most instances you cannot beat first-hand information. Other relatives in your family may remember what your relative did during their military service and can pass on stories which were told to them. Your family may also know of documents, medals or photographs held by your extended family which can assist in your research.

Once you have spoken to your relatives, and hopefully have some basic information, it is now time to dig a little deeper.

## Service Records

The records for service personnel after 1945 are held by the Ministry of Defence. Access is possible, but not simple.

If the person concerned still lives, then they can make an application for their own service record free of charge. If they have passed away, but their spouse is still living then they can apply for no cost. The next of kin can apply for a service record, but there is an administrative fee of £30. If you are not the next of kin, you can still apply but for the first 25 years after the death of the individual the information you receive will be restricted to the following:

- surname
- forename
- rank
- service number
- regiment/corps
- place of birth
- age
- date of birth
- date of death where this occurred in service
- the date an individual joined the service
- the date of leaving
- good conduct medals (for example, Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (LS&GCM)), any orders of chivalry and gallantry medals (decorations of valour) awarded, some of which may have been announced in the London Gazette

After the 25 year period you will also receive the following information:

- the units in which he/she served
- the dates of this service and the locations of those units
- the ranks in which the service was carried out and details of campaign medals awarded

The information in service records can vary depending on which branch of the service they were in – a small number of cases there may be little or no information to be found. Please note that in this instance the administration fee is non-refundable.

The application is made direct to the Ministry of Defence – a link is at the end of this guide.

## Did the individual die in service?

Unlike the two World Wars, service deaths for more modern conflicts are not commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Instead, a roll of honour named the **Armed Force Memorial** (AFM) exists. The **Armed Forces Memorial** looks after the names listed on the memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, and also an online Roll of Honour. The memorial commemorates those killed in training, on exercise, during operations as well as battle casualties while the roll of honour lists all those who died in service regardless of the cause – therefore while a name might be on the roll of honour, he or she may not necessarily have their name inscribed on the physical memorial.

The AFM is not as detailed as registers for the two World Wars, but it does give useful information such as service number, dates of birth and death, and in many instances a place of burial.

Men or women from Scotland, or who served in a Scots unit will be commemorated in the **Scottish National War Memorial**. The actual memorial itself is located in Edinburgh Castle, and contains rolls of the fallen for each Scottish Regiment, as well as registers for Scots killed while serving in other regiments. These registers can be searched online.

The **General Register Office for Scotland** has entries for Service Returns which include Army returns of deaths of Scottish persons at military stations abroad up to 1959, and Service Departments Registers of deaths outside the United Kingdom of persons ordinarily resident in Scotland who are serving in or employed by HM Forces, including families of members of the Forces from 1959 onwards. For records up to 1963 these can be viewed online at the **scotlandspeople** website. From 1963 onwards you can order an extract or view the records by visiting New Register House in Edinburgh. **Scotlandspeople** also operate a "hub" in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow – access there is the same as New Register House, so researchers on the West Coast of Scotland can save themselves a journey!

**Scotlandspeople** also has Scottish soldiers wills – a handful date from after the Second World War.

Some names for conflicts after the Second World War have been added to local war memorials, and in some places there are specific memorials for later conflicts – the national memorial to the Korean War in West Lothian for example

Many of these memorials can be viewed online thanks to the work of the **Scottish War Memorials Project**, which seeks to document every military memorial in Scotland or with a Scottish connection outside of the country. It is possible to search for an individual on their website, and you can view photographs of the memorial your individual is listed on as well as possibly finding out some additional information carried out by the members of the Project.

A sister project to the Scottish War Memorials Project is the **Scottish War Graves Project**, which has a similar aim to document every military grave in Scotland. If your military relative is buried in Scotland, their grave may be on their website. Those buried abroad may be commemorated on a family grave in Scotland, so it is worth searching in order to locate some additional family information.

### Medals

Most service personnel will have earned at least one campaign medal during their service, and these can be the best way of finding out where someone served at a particular time. The UK government have a page which details the criteria for each service medal. A link is given at the end of this guide.

Ancestry has scanned campaign medal rolls available – although most of them are for earlier campaigns dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it does contain the medal roll for the campaign in Palestine between 1945 and 1948.

For later campaigns, the Armed Services Medal Office should be contacted. The address is at the end of this guide.

If your family member was lucky enough to be decorated for a gallant action, you will be able to find the citation which describes the actions behind the award. If your relative was one of the very few to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest award for gallantry, then the information about the circumstances are fairly easy to obtain via the internet or several published books.

Gallantry awards for all branches of military service were published in the London Gazette – many of them including the citation. The Gazette is now available to view online and can be searched. The search function can be difficult to navigate but eventually worthwhile.

Citations for awards of gallantry are also available on the **National Archives** website. These are the original scanned citations so occasionally you will see that the award initially recommended is sometimes not the one which was eventually awarded. **Ancestry** provides an easy to use search facility for these recommendations, but the actual paying for and viewing of images is done with the **National Archives**.

### Other Sources

**The National Archives** contains a number of series of records which may be useful. A search of their catalogue, *Discovery*, is recommended.

Local newspapers frequently reported on men from their area that had been decorated for gallantry, had been wounded or who had simply been serving in a particular campaign. Your local library may have historic local newspapers on microfilm or will know where they can be viewed. The **British Newspaper Archive** has a number of newspapers with coverage up to the mid-1950s. The National Library of Scotland has access to some newspapers through its digital archive facility and **The Times** (up to 2008) and

The Scotsman newspaper (up to 1950) have their own archives online at a fee. National newspapers may only have information on casualties and awards for gallantry but local papers may have much more information.

If the subject of your research was an officer, you can trace his career by consulting the Army, Navy, or Air Force List. This was published monthly by the War Office and was a complete listing of every officer in the relevant branch of service. All men were listed in ascending order of the date they were promoted and show the dates they were promoted to each rank. Each volume is indexed so if you do not know their regiment it is still possible to locate him or her. Complete sets of these Lists are available at the **Imperial War Museum** in London and the **National Archives** at Kew. Your local library may be able to obtain copies as well, and some may be found for sale on **eBay**.

Regimental histories tend to be fairly general in their scope and don't focus on the individual soldiers, but as later conflicts had smaller numbers of casualties it may be possible to find mention of an individual. Your local library may be able to obtain copies of some regimental histories for you. Alternatively, the regimental museums will hold copies and the library at the **National War Museum** at Edinburgh Castle is quite extensive, although the short opening hours of the library can be quite restrictive.

It can also be worthwhile considering visiting the museum of the Regiment your relative served in – it will contain artefacts and information which will help build a picture of what life was like for them in service. Most regiments have a website and may offer research. A quick search should locate the website of the particular regiment you seek. The website of the **Ogilby Trust** also lists all regimental museums in the British Isles. The museum may offer a research service for a fee – this can vary in the amount of information you will receive. It is usually better to do your own research, so find out if they allow visiting researchers – each museum will offer a slightly different service.

Other larger museums include the Imperial War Museum, the National Army Museum and the National War Museum of Scotland – all are well worth visiting and possess extensive libraries but may have restricted opening hours for the libraries.

The website for each branch of the armed forces is useful to visit for information on life in the modern day military.

The “**naval-history.net**” has some excellent information including a listing of Royal Navy casualties up to 2008.

**Britain's Small Wars** is an excellent site covering the history of British military conflicts since 1945. It includes histories for each conflict, and Rolls of Honour for each. The site is no longer updated, but the information already there makes it invaluable.

Online discussion forums can be an invaluable source of expertise – many visitors to forums have incredibly detailed knowledge on their specialised subject and are often happy to share that information with others. The forum at the **Army Rumour Service** may prove useful, but be warned – this is a forum for serving and former military personnel, and the language can sometimes get quite “industrial”! The aforementioned **Scottish War Memorials Project** and **Scottish War Graves Project** also have members willing to assist with queries.

#### Websites and places to visit

##### Main sources

**Armed Forces Memorial:** Armed Forces Memorial Trust, National Memorial Arboretum, Croxall Road, Alrewas, Staffordshire, DE13 7AR

Website: <http://www.veterans-uk.info/afm2/index.php>

**The Scottish National War Memorial,** The Castle, Edinburgh, EH1 2YT

Website: [www.snmw.org](http://www.snmw.org)

**The General Register Office for Scotland,** New Register House, 3 West Register Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3YT

Website for online research: [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

**Armed Services Medal Office:** Ministry of Defence Medal Office, AFPAA (JPAC), Building 250, RAF Innsworth, GL3 1HW.

**The National Archives,** Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU

Website: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

##### Other online resources

Ancestry: [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

Findmypast: [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

Service records: <https://www.gov.uk/requests-for-personal-data-and-service-records>

Regimental War Diaries: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/army-second-world-war-operations.htm>

The Scottish War Memorials and War Graves Projects: [www.scottishmilitaryresearch.co.uk](http://www.scottishmilitaryresearch.co.uk)

UK Government medal information: <https://www.gov.uk/medals-campaigns-descriptions-and-eligibility>

The London Gazette: <http://www.gazettes-online.co.uk/>

The British Newspaper Archive: <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

Naval History: <http://www.naval-history.net/index.htm>

Britain's Small Wars: <http://britains-smallwars.com/>

British Army website: [www.army.mod.uk](http://www.army.mod.uk)

Royal Navy website: [www.royalnavy.mod.uk/](http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/)

The Royal Air Force website: <http://www.raf.mod.uk>

Army Rumour Service forum: <http://www.arrse.co.uk/community/>

### **Museums**

**The Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London, SE1 6HZ**

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

**The National Army Museum, Royal Hospital Road, London, SW3 4HT**

Website: <http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk/>

**National War Museum, The Castle, Edinburgh, EH1 2NG**

Website: [http://www.nms.ac.uk/our\\_museums/war\\_museum.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/our_museums/war_museum.aspx)

**Royal Naval Museum, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth, PO1 3NH**

Website: <http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/>

**The Royal Air Force Museum** has two locations, at Colindale in North London, and at Cosford near Birmingham. The website is <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/>

There are many Regimental museums, and the best way to find one is to visit the website of the Ogilby Trust, which is described as "the definitive guide to the regimental and corps museums of the British Army spread throughout the United Kingdom". The website address is: <http://www.armymuseums.org.uk/>