

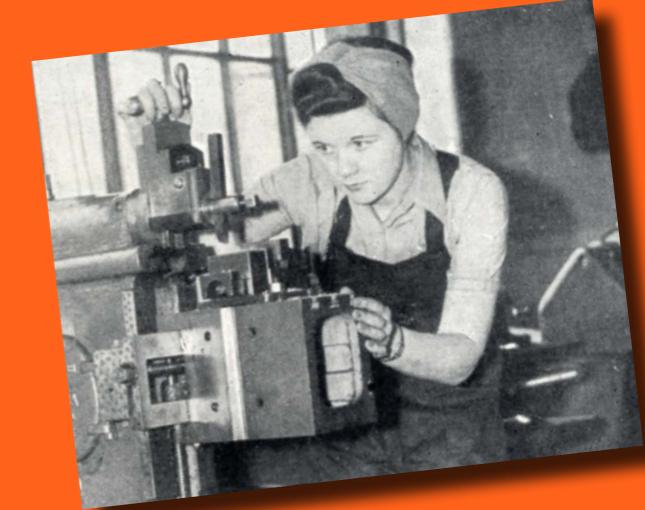


TUTORIALS & GUIDES  
FORCES-WAR-RECORDS.CO.UK  
THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY GENEALOGY SPECIALISTS

# Quick guide to requesting WW2 records



# Requesting records on WW2 & inter-war servicemen and women from the MoD



Military genealogy can be a tricky beast to get to grips with for a number of reasons, from the destruction of material to difficulties interpreting acronyms.

By far the most common problem that people researching their family trees come across is a shortage of accessible records relating to the Second World War. The Public Records Act governs which materials created by the government can be released over what timescales. To begin with the rule was that records over 50 years old could be released to the Public Records Office or The National Archives. That timescale was later reduced to 30 years, and more recently to 20. However, there are numerous exceptions which continue to restrict access, e.g. when release of records may cause damage to the country's image, national security or foreign relations.

Records from the Second World War fall under these restrictions, as many of the men and women who served are still alive and wouldn't want personal information disclosed. Thus you won't find the full record for a relative who fought in that war anywhere except with the Ministry of Defence.

Small parts of a Second World War serviceman's record may be found, such as those listing his or her death, capture or medals awarded. Forces War Records, for example, has access to the registers of British and Commonwealth Second World War dead, as well as Home Guard nominal rolls.

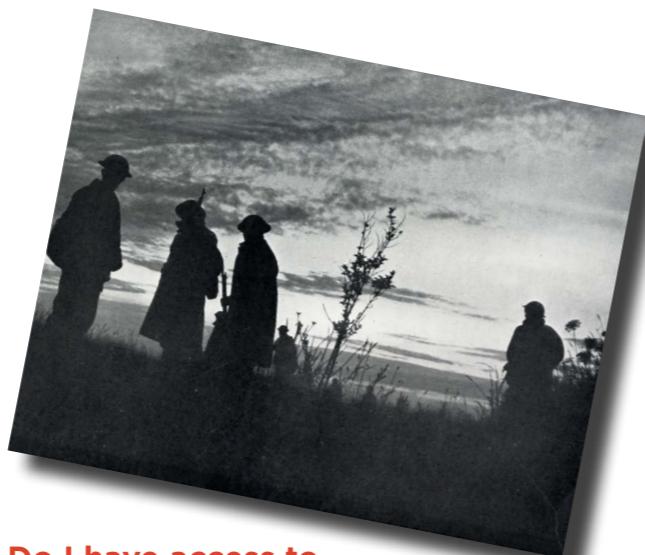
In the previous issue's 'Five Minute Tutorial' we went hunting for my Great Uncle Clive Robinson, who served with the Green Howards and was killed on Dunkirk beach. We found a listing of his death on Forces War Records, along with details including his Rank, Service Number and Unit. But what if we want to find out a bit more?

First we want to navigate to [www.gov.uk/requests-for-personal-data-and-service-records](http://www.gov.uk/requests-for-personal-data-and-service-records) and read through all the information the MoD have on how to apply, what information they might hold and what details they will require to complete a search.

Before downloading the forms you will need to ask yourself:

## Is the serviceman I'm looking for details on still alive?

If so, the process to request the documents is slightly different. The Data Protection Act allows any living person to request their details stored by any organisation, including the MoD. In this instance there is no Admin Fee, the MoD simply requires the Subject Access Request (SAR) form to be properly filled out, signed and sent to them. This can be filled out on behalf of the serviceman, but you must have written consent or a Court Order as specified on the SAR form.



## Do I have access to or need a Death Certificate?

A Death Certificate is required to prove that the full details of the serviceman can be released in accordance with the Duty of Care the MoD owes to families. Death Certificates can be obtained from the General Records Office if required. If the serviceman was killed while in service, a Death Certificate is not required.

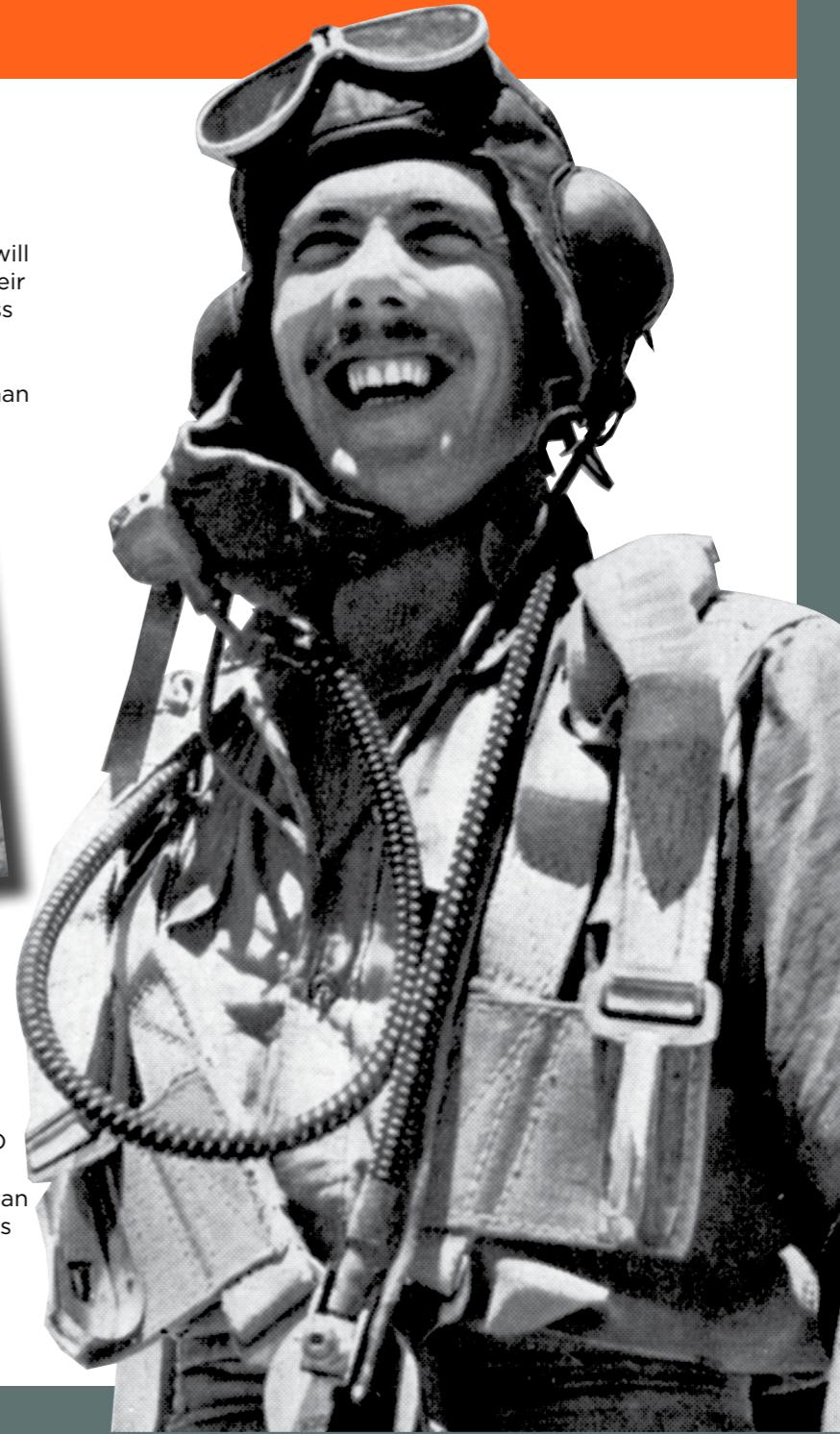
## Am I the Next of Kin?

If you are the closest living relative of the person in question then you will be able to access all the information the MoD has on the serviceman you are looking for. If you are not their closest relative, you will need written permission from that relation to get their full record. Failing that, you will still be able to access some information, but major details will be lacking. Please see [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for a full list of the pieces of information that can be given to somebody other than the Next of Kin.



## Home Guard or Regular Service?

Home Guard records are kept separately from the Second World War Armed Services records and different forms must be filled out to obtain them. In part this is because the information held by the MoD on Home Guard soldiers is limited, and searches are often unsuccessful. Former Home Guard members can request their own records in exactly the same way as detailed for former Second World War servicemen.



# Requesting records on WW2 & inter-war servicemen and women from the MoD



The forms themselves are very easy to understand and the MoD has explained everything you have to do. When filling out the forms it is important to remember that there are mandatory fields that MUST be filled out, otherwise the MoD will not proceed with your application.

While the MoD will endeavour to provide everything they have on the serviceman applied for, as mentioned previously, where documents may compromise national security or foreign relations they can and will be withheld. In such instances, the MoD will inform you of the details of the exemption under the Freedom of Information Act.

Getting back to my Uncle Clive Robinson and requesting his records, as far as I know my mother is his only surviving Next of Kin, which means we will want to use the forms available on the MoD site marked for Next of Kin.

These essentially ask you to confirm your identity, address and relationship to the data subject, and to attach the Admin Fee and the Death Certificate where appropriate. In this case my great uncle was killed during the war, so a Death Certificate is not required.

We then need to download the form for requesting Army records (you will need to download a different form if your relative was in the Air Force, and another again for the Navy).

This is where you will need to list all known details about the soldier you are searching for. Mandatory fields include Full Name, Service Number and Date of Birth. Extra fields are given for Unit and Rank, and it is always worth filling these out if you know them. The more information you can provide the better.

Once completed, we then need to send both forms, along with any necessary attachments, to the address provided on the second form, in this case the Army Personnel Centre. It will vary depending on the service that your ancestor belonged to, since the Armed Services store their documents in different locations.

Now it is just a case of waiting for the results, which can take 6 to 12 months to arrive (and we have heard of searches taking as long as 18 months). In all cases we are aware of, though, the recipients have been pleased with what was provided in the end.

Do bear in mind that these are paper based documents and may not contain all the information that you are hoping for. Very rarely do they contain exact references to deployments and whereabouts, and they almost never contain medal citations. They will however list medal awards, and if you are lucky might even contain a photograph.

## Was your ancestor a casualty in WW2?

### Search our exclusive collection:

#### WW2 Daily reports

(missing, dead, wounded & POWs)

Exclusive to Forces War Records

Over 380,000 men died, up to 150,000 were wounded and a further 180,000 men were held as POWs in the years 1939 -1945.

#### Where did these records come from?

Kept under reference WO417 at the national archives these 'daily' reports were made on a 24/48 hour basis and often include information that can't be sourced anywhere else! Occasionally reports are amended - meaning a record will include a 1st report and a later change with locations & dates, sometimes next of kin are also included.

#### Why is this collection significant?

Whilst 'normal' for enlisted men, it is however highly unusual to find an officers 'service number' in most records, meaning this information alone can help to 'find' individual officers elsewhere, even with very common surnames!



*"Hello, could I just say that this is one of the best websites I have used. Not only is the content fantastic but the way it is presented is very clear. So just to say many thanks from a very satisfied user". Colin Herbert*

**This collection has now reached 1 million records**





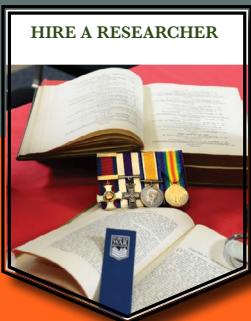
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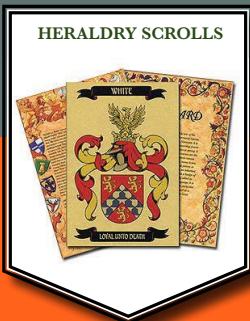
MEDALS



HIRE A RESEARCHER



RECOGNITION SCROLLS



HERALDRY SCROLLS



GIFT MEMBERSHIP

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Over 2 million records in our exclusive collections  
you'll not find anywhere else online, including:

- Military Hospital Admissions & Discharge Registers WWI
- WWII Daily reports (missing, dead, wounded & POWs)
- Home Guard Officer Lists 1939-45
- Imperial prisoners of war in Japan
- Prudential Assurance Roll of Honour 1914-18
- UK Army List 1916
- Seedies Merchant Navy Awards

*...and many many more*

