



INTRODUCING

FORCES-WAR-RECORDS.CO.UK

THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY GENEALOGY SPECIALISTS

SEARCH MORE THAN 10 MILLION RECORDS

GETTING STARTED

Your complete guide to researching your military ancestor: where to start, how to search, and what to do if you hit a brick wall.



PLUS: Discover how your ancestors' information gets online, from (often handwritten) original documents, to data that you can easily search.



IT'S ABOUT YOUR FAMILY
YOU YOUR ANCESTORS
YOUR HISTORY

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE: Everything you'll need to research your ancestor who served in the army, navy or airforce...

Welcome to our guide to help you understand how you can find as much out about your ancestors past as possible.

We are always happy to help you in any way we can, perhaps by pointing you in the right direction or even advising you of what is actually possible in our experience and sadly, what may not be.

The guidelines below are based on dedicated research and our findings throughout our thousands of hours spent on individual and general military & conflict searches. Please use these guidelines and helpful hints & links in the first instance to get you started, if you reach a brick wall or are confused at any time simply **contact us** or/and ask a question in the free to use **British Genealogy forum**.

Researching military records can be a daunting task, some of our helpful hints are sure to assist you in your quest. When searching it is very useful if you already have the following:

- Full name of the individual. If you have as full a name as possible as this will make tracking your individual easier. E.g. John Smith. There are hundreds of 'J Smiths' in the casualty roll of each year WWI alone.
- If you have a middle name it will make things a bit easier. E.g. John A Smith, although bear in mind that some records will only hold the first initial which makes things a little harder on a first search.
- The Service in which they served - Army, Royal Navy or Air Force.
- Rank and Regiment or Naval Ship or Squadron Having the service number can be particularly helpful as this is 'a unique identifier'.
- Find out when the person served; Pre First World War, First World War, and after 1920

Some records will be much more complete depending on the era and even if the record is still regarded as 'restricted'.

- The more details you already have the better. Even the Enlistment date and Demobilisation dates are useful as well.

We'll be covering all of the services, starting with the army...

BRITISH ARMY

Soldiers had a 'service record', sadly about 70% of WWI records were destroyed from the 1930's onwards by various civil service audits of the bulk of the material, however the worst damage came from a direct hit on the Arnside (London) repository in an air raid on the 2nd day of the Blitz and the damage also caused in putting the raging fires out.

A service records the military career of the individual, it is made up of various different military forms. The types of forms will differ greatly, this goes hand in hand with the fact that many records will be handwritten and have annotations from the serviceman/woman themselves or

a dependents enquiry, therefore whilst very interesting per se, the general legibility of some records is poor. Service records are sometimes the only place where family details, age, birthplace and former occupations are recorded.

COLLECTION WO363 'THE BURNT RECORDS'- THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Many pre WWI records were destroyed intentionally by the war department in the 1930's, many more were destroyed in the Blitz of 1940. The bulk consists of discharge records of those leaving the army between 1914 and 1921, including those who died, sadly only between 20-30% of the total now survive and the originals are not accessible: there are microfiche copies of the surviving records although many are severely damaged by fire and water.

PRE WWI AND UP UNTIL 1920

Pre WWI and records up to 1920 are held at the National Archives in Kew, and are available to view there by appointment. WWI Medal cards are also available to download, for a fee, from National Archives - Documents Online. Please use our document expert service for any help you need in interpreting these. <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/photo-expert>

There are records other than WO363 within the national archive which are not presently available elsewhere:

- WO364 - commonly misnamed as 'the pension records' these contain a small part of what would have originally been in a service record for a number of persons.
- WO97 - Service records until 1914, many remain in their original format at TNA.
- WO96 - as per wo97 but for the militias that existed until 1908.
- PIN26- pensions records, a very small collection.

It is worth noting that if a soldier reenlisted and served therefore after 1921 his records would still be held by the MOD only (see below).



YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE

1921 TO THE PRESENT INCLUDING WWII

All British service records are available only from the MOD directly, they are not online anywhere at all.

Full details can be found on this government website: www.gov.uk/veterans-uk

The MOD restrict access to living veterans records for the veteran themselves only, ex service personnel should also use the veterans-UK website to download the request forms.

There is supposedly a time expiry when such records will be released to the archives but this is rumoured now to be 100 years+!

All Australian records are held by the National archives of Australia <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/defence/service-records/army-wwii.aspx>

TNA COLLECTIONS:

- WO339 - Officers records up until 1922, incomplete, most senior officers not included.
- WO374 - TA Officers prior to 1922.
- WO400 - Household cavalry regiments.

ARMY MEDALS

Campaign medals

These are crucially important if you cannot find a service record. If any soldier was posted overseas he will have qualified for a campaign medal. Medal records do not have age, address or next of kin information, however a soldier's details were listed on a 'medal roll', usually including the regiments name (not corps however), and service number and a roll index number and rank. A soldier may have more than one medal index roll.

Gallantry Awards

Awards are generally made for specific acts of bravery, although a few were given in new years and Kings/Queens birthday honours, many have a citation published which describes the act of valour they were awarded for, however this is not always the case: The Military medal being a case in point. Awards and citations are generally recorded in the London 'gazette' and were then replicated a day or so later in 'the times', often citations and mentions in despatches are called 'gazetted' in actual fact.

Actions leading to an award are often referred to in a unit's war diary, or even their regimental history. Gallantry award card indexes do exist in TNA but these are not complete.

Foreign Awards

Many allied nations also bestowed awards to British service personnel, notably France and Belgium in WWI. The wearing of foreign medals was/is not permitted unless with royal decree however!

Foreign medals do not generally have a citation record. Long service and good conduct medals WO102 TNA lists awards up until 1919 only.

Silver War Badge

This was first made in 1916 to those who were honourably discharged: perhaps in recognition that they

might otherwise be viewed with suspicion! It was also retrospectively issued to those who had served since 1914. Records for these are shown in TNA WO329.

PRESS

Deaths were usually recorded in 'The Times' and 'The Scotsman' in some cases, the times archive is available for viewing via some libraries and educational establishments.

Casualties for both WWI & WWII are also fully listed within the **IWGC** (now known as the CWGC) registers.

These registers were originally published in the 1920's and we have many within our historic documents collection, they are split by cemetery/memorial and list both those who have an individual grave and those who are commemorated on an official memorial.

Some of the larger editions & books have detailed plans and photographs of the cemeteries.

ROYAL NAVY

The Navy has always prided itself on good record keeping: accuracy was often a matter of life and death in navigation terms and record keeping followed this naval tradition! Was the person an officer or rating? If the person was an officer you should find their name in the Navy List.

Prior to 1860 it is important to know the name of a ship that the person you are looking for, served on in the case of sailors, and which company or division a marine served in. Nearly all of the records of service for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines from 1860-1923 still survive. The records, whilst very thorough, do not always contain the records of the person you are looking for. The admiralty records are usually arranged according to when an individual joined. The records of Royal Navy ratings from 1873 are arranged by service number.

The following records have been moved from the former PRO (public record office) to the **National Archive** (TNA) and are available for public access: Royal Navy Officers commissioned prior to 1914, Royal Navy Ratings who enlisted prior to 1924, First World War records for the Women's Royal Naval Service, Royal Marine Officers commissioned prior to 1926, Royal Marine Other Ranks that enlisted prior to 1926.

NAVY MEDALS

If you have any medals awarded to a member of the Royal Navy or Royal Marines are usually named with the recipient's details, either on the back or around the edge, these may additionally be useful in narrowing down the medal award to a particular conflict or campaign and thus possibly a date.



YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE

WWI

50,000 men who served during WWI are available to search and download from the National Archives Documents Online - Documents-Royal Naval Division.

AFTER WWI

Prior to 1972 Royal Naval personnel were given their service records on discharge. Only pay details were kept for Pension purposes. Therefore the only information held on RN personnel who served prior to 1972 is their Service details (number, rank, name etc) and a list of dates and ships/shore bases. As with Army searches there must be a Search Document and a Certificate of Kinship. Visit http://www.veterans-uk.info/service_records/royal_navy.html

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Prior to 1922 Officers and Airmen serving before 1924 are held at The National Archives. Records for Airmen and Officers serving after these dates are held by the RAF. These records are retained by Service Number, Rank and Full Name, and will also contain the Date of Birth. It is important that as much information as possible can be provided in order to locate the correct record.

For current and former airmen a search document must be completed or in the case of family members of deceased airmen a completed search document and, a Certificate of Kinship must accompany along with the appropriate fee. These forms can be downloaded from this site and the address as to where to send them is also given.

http://www.veterans-uk.info/service_records/raf.html

All Services

- Operational data
- War diaries

Overseas units recorded their daily movements and actions in a war diary, these may be very useful if you wish to research why a gallantry medal was issued or which action a person was killed in. War diaries are held in TNA WO95. Some, although not all by a long stretch, will be meticulous in recording deaths and wounded.

Not all diaries have survived to be archived, some regimental museums will contain the original document and may allow access upon request.

POW RECORDS

There are some records currently held within the UK, some of the best records for European theatre of WWI and WWII are only held by the Swiss Red Cross. However, there is no guarantee that anything will be produced by a search. These are, however, a definitive source for camp transfers.

There are some records held at the TNA. An oddity is a list produced in WWI by Cox & Co, the merchant bank which can be found on www.forces-war-records.co.uk. An officers list was produced during WWI, and sometimes war diaries will also record those taken prisoner. Records of men who died during captivity are kept by the Commonwealth War Graves commission. The order of St John of Jerusalem also has some data up until July 1917.

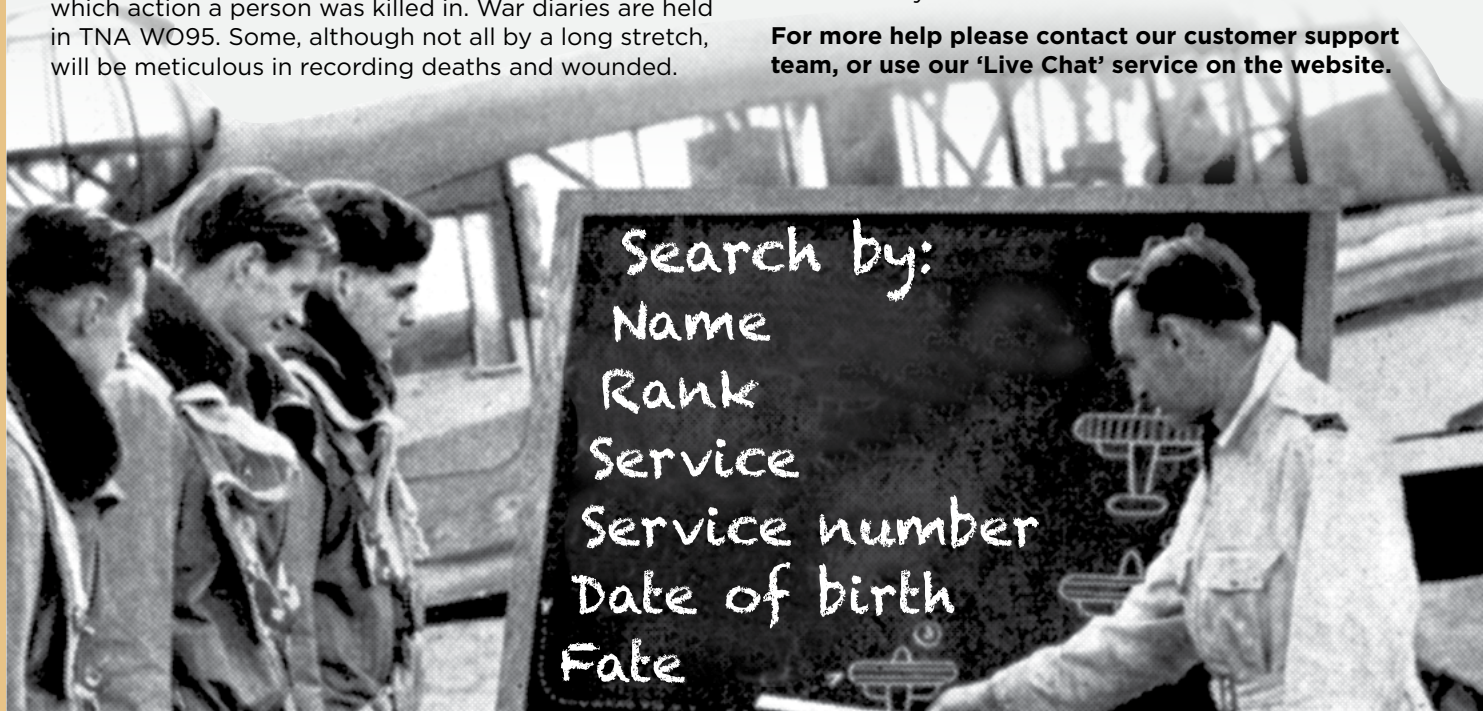
There are some very detailed notes and further information to assist you here:

- **European Camps-British & Commonwealth Prisoners of war 1939-45**
- **Prisoners of War of the Japanese 1939-1945**
- **WWI Prisoners of War in Germany & Turkey**
- **The Black Book.** The Nazi wanted list 1940. The 'Black book' was a popularised name of the Nazi 'special wanted arrest list' drawn up for the immediate period after a successful Nazi invasion in 1940.

Collections you can search on the Forces War Records website:

- List of British Officers taken prisoner (WWI)
- Imperial Prisoners of war held in Italy 1943 - Exclusively Transcribed
- Imperial Prisoners of war held in Japan - Exclusively Transcribed
- Prisoners of War of the British Empire held in Germany 1939-45

For more help please contact our customer support team, or use our 'Live Chat' service on the website.



NEED FURTHER HELP?: Discover more than just a record

It's exciting when you discover a new ancestor. An extra piece to the puzzle, a fresh leaf on the family tree, suddenly opening up new avenues of investigation and potentially leading to even more family members.

With military relatives, the first thing to come to light is often a named record, which might mention a regiment, rank, and if you're lucky perhaps a service number, date of birth and details of next of kin. So far so good... but what does this data really tell you about who they were, or what they went through in the war? Very little, but thanks to our country's many cherished regimental museums, libraries and military archives, a few scant pieces of information could prove to be the key to unlocking a veritable treasure trove of detail.

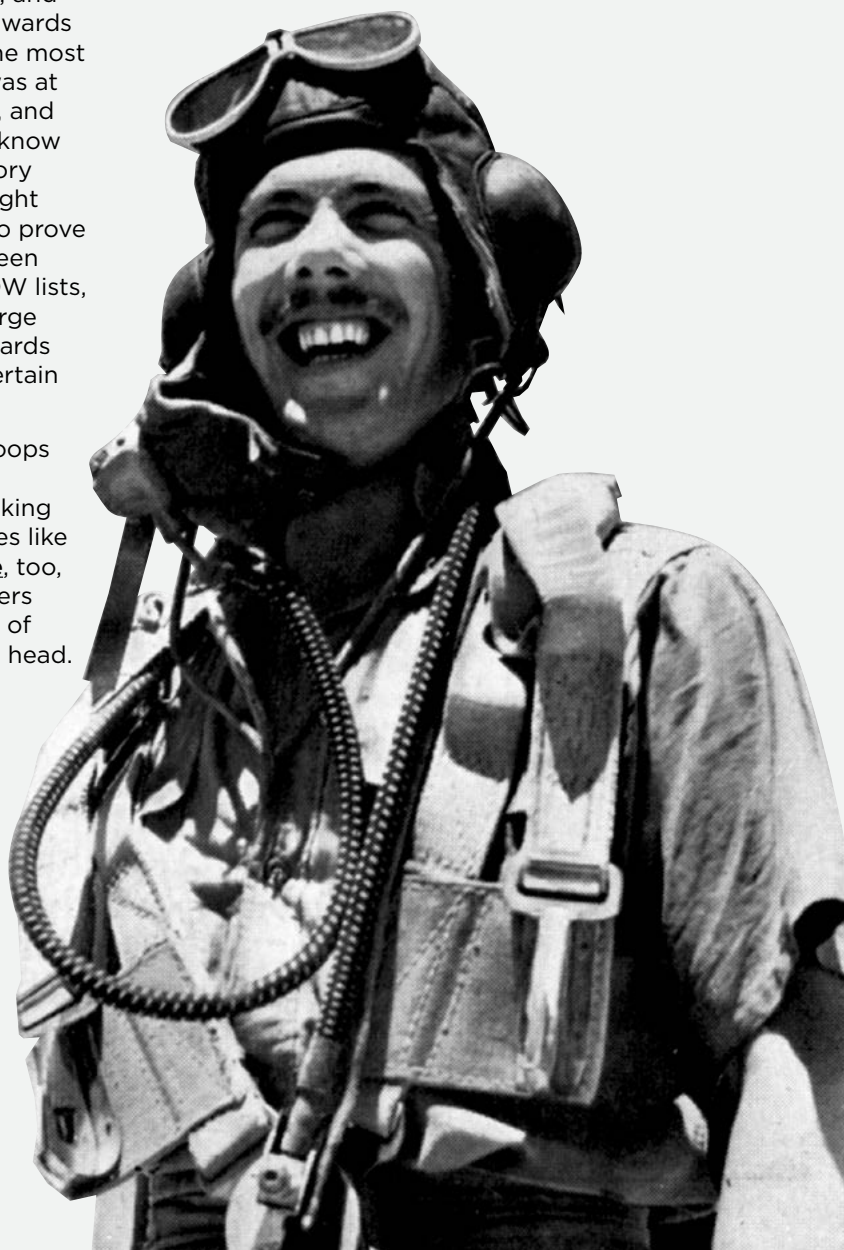
Once you know your ancestor's regiment, why not take a look in the National Archives, the relevant County's Record Office or the regiment's own museum for a Regimental War Diary or Operational Record? Prior to World War One there weren't official diaries, but officers often kept unofficial notes while on active service, and some histories were later published. From 1914 onwards official diaries were kept, and the notes of even the most concise of clerks will reveal where the regiment was at each stage of the war, what battles it took part in, and potentially who died or was honoured. Once you know what the unit was doing on a particular date, history books alone can tell you a lot about what they might have gone through. Of course, it can be difficult to prove that your ancestor was present – he could have been wounded or on leave – but medal index cards, POW lists, Red Cross records, hospital admission and discharge registers, or perhaps even records of gallantry awards or mentions in dispatches, can help to pinpoint certain individuals.

Local newspapers often carried details of local troops killed or reported missing, or trumpeted honours granted to men or units, so it's always worth checking local libraries for listings of your relative. Resources like Forces War Records' **Historic Documents Archive**, too, may contain original personal accounts by members of that unit – hugely valuable in revealing the sort of thoughts that might have entered your ancestor's head.

Once you've discovered your military ancestor, you'll want to learn more about their world, and fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle.

Rolls of Honour can provide more detail than you ever dreamed of finding. Schools, universities, work places and even Councils sometimes compiled these; many list just the basic details of those who gave their lives in battle, but others devote a page to each man who died, or sometimes even each man who served, with a photograph and paragraph describing their full war service. It can be harder to find information about relatives in the Royal Navy, as logs often went down with a ship or recorded only navigational detail, but the Royal Air Force and many ancillary services also demanded that officers keep diaries. With World War Two ancestors, meanwhile, such records tend to be held by the **MOD**, and can be requested in writing.

Once you've found your relative, doors of this sort will start to open if you think outside the box and explore as many different avenues as you can. It will take time and effort, but as your ancestor starts to develop a face, a personality and a tangible past, it will all seem worthwhile! Start enriching your research today at www.forces-war-records.co.uk.



INSIDE INFORMATION: How does your ancestors' data get from original document to being online?

Accuracy you can trust

We transcribe military personnel records from a vast array of sources, many of which are untapped by anyone else, and unavailable anywhere else on the internet. Our archive has been built from sources such as the following.

- National and Local Archives
- Military Museums
- Official Army, Navy and Royal Air Force lists
- Rare books such as university or company rolls of honour
- Battalion histories

Our archive also includes thousands of rare books, magazines and other documents, all of which are available for you to view online. Many of these contain mentions of service personnel, but all of which contain fascinating insights into the life of a soldier, sailor and airman.

Firstly we scan original documents, using the very best equipment to ensure all of the data is visible from the image. The military records which we input were not intended to be used for public view and are not always that easy to read. Often the handwriting is not very neat or the document is faint. One page can be very straightforward and then the very next page is a real challenge.

Most of what we read these days is printed material whether it is in a book or on a computer screen. We expect to recognise words and letter shapes without any difficulty but with unfamiliar handwriting it isn't always that easy and we may have to go back to basics and look at individual letters and break the words down.

How we read...

When we read we do not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole. The order of the letters can be a little messy but you can still read it without a problem.

Reading scans of hand-written documents

Everyone writes differently and the same word can look quite different in different hands. Hand-writing was taught more formally in the past than it is now and letter formations which were common place and familiar a hundred years ago may not be very familiar to you today. Add to that personal style and hand-written documents may be quite difficult to read. We read so much printed text in the form of email that we rarely write letters to each other any longer and have got out of practice reading hand-written correspondence.

We follow very exact procedures for inputting. When the data is entered on the system the team managers check every entry before it is uploaded on to the system, the work is also double checked by the Data Standards Officer, to check for errors and ensure consistency. We then combine the personal records with more specialist information about regiments, ships, squadron and so on, to help you piece together your ancestor's military journey.



Additional information

We also use our vast knowledge of military matters, to intelligently make suggestions about where your ancestor may have served, what campaign medals they may have been entitled to and much more.

The extra clues we give you can be invaluable when trying to piece together the detail of your ancestor's service.

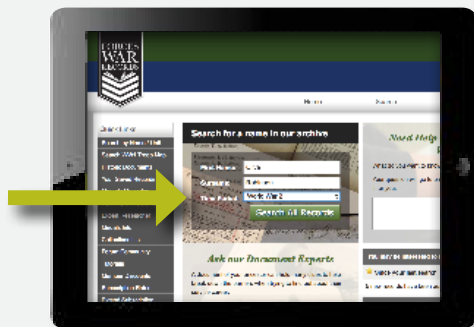
Uploading to the website

The work is not uploaded until all are happy that the work is accurate. Once the project is underway there is continued spot checking to ensure standards haven't slipped. We are currently undertaking a detailed accuracy study of our own to confirm that accuracy levels are high.

YOUR QUICK GUIDE: Help with finding the person that you're after... quickly and easily!

Forces War Records has over 10 million records stretching from as far back as 1356 right up to the present. That's a pretty daunting search task, so we've tried to make it as easy as possible to drill down to that sweet golden nugget of a result. It's worth noting that as with anything Military Genealogy, we can't ever guarantee a find because so much has been lost or destroyed, especially documents of those who survived the war.

1 We'll start with an easily found record, that of my Great Uncle Clive Robinson, who was killed during the evacuation of Dunkirk. In the main search box input Forename, Surname and Service Period.

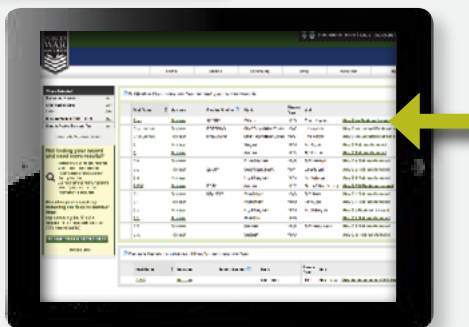


2 This gives 341 results! We'll need to add more information in order to find Clive.

On the left hand side we can now add that he was killed in action, then click on 'Update My Results'.



3 If Clive's record had not appeared through this search I could have clicked on the 'Advanced Filter' and added information such as Clive's Service Number, or Unit.



4 That instantly gets us down to 15 records, and Clive Robinson is visible as result number 1, a Private in the Green Howards. That was a relatively easy search due in part to the fact that the deaths of British Troops have been better recorded than the survivors thanks to the Imperial War Graves Commission.

So, how about something a little more complex, an Australian Imperial Force Officer in WW1, who was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in action; Lieutenant (later Captain) John Stuart Dight Walker MC, of the Australian Machine Gun Corps.

1 We'll start with just his name and service period from the homepage, which gives us a total of 1743 results.



2 Once again we'll use the Advanced Search section and start selecting the appropriate filters. We know Lieutenant Walker received the Military Cross, which is a Gallantry award, so we'll select that and we'll once again use the 'Died in Active Service' filter, this gives us 12 matches.



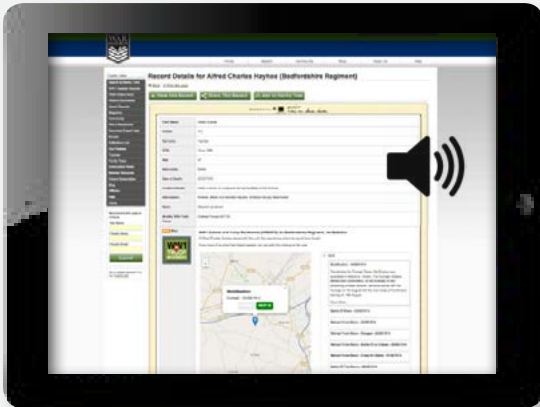
3 Lieutenant Walker went on to be promoted to Captain in the 11th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) before losing his life in 1918. There we have it, 4 records containing information about John Stuart Dight Walker.

NEED MORE HELP WITH YOUR BRICK WALLS?

The Forces War Records military experts are on tap. You can email customer-care@forces-war-records.co.uk, or get in touch via the live chat option, or post your request on Facebook

YOUR QUICK GUIDE: Tracking the troop movements of your WW1 army ancestor

VISIT WWW.FORCES-WAR-RECORDS.CO.UK/MAPS/SEARCH



A new 'moving' interactive, audio-visual feature developed by Forces War Records.

This new feature on the Forces War Records website is an interactive, audio visual map that you can use to track the battalion your WW1 army ancestor would have been with. Army records that have the battalion listed are very likely to have the WW1 Troop Movements map feature. Discover more about your military ancestor with our NEW interactive map that tracks the movements of WW1 army troops. Click on a unit or battle and watch the movements unfold step by step, as you listen to a description of what happened at each location. Please ensure you have the volume turned up to hear the narration.

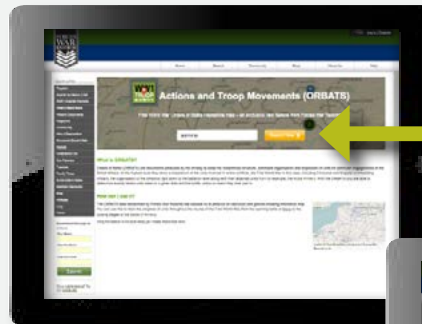
THE EXPERTISE BEHIND IT

Our specialist data team has been working for some time to transcribe the official Orders of Battle publications, published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, as well as numerous official histories of the Great War, to help create this in-depth record of military operations and engagements by the British Army. All of this information is now available to Forces War Records members in the form of this new interactive map, and we hope that it will provide an insight into the movements and actions of your ancestor.

HAVING TROUBLE?

The Forces War Records Customer Support team is always on hand. Simply click on the 'Help' button in both menu bars on every page of the website. Our fully trained support team also have unparalleled military and genealogy experience. Email: customercare@forces-war-records.co.uk.

Or get in touch with us via Facebook.



1 If you know your WW1 army ancestor's unit, now you can see where he was based...

Type either the battle or the unit name into the main search box then click the orange button.



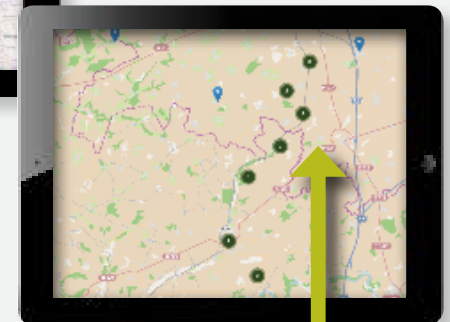
2 A list of all the units appears

You can choose a unit to click on to start your journey.



3 Discover his unit's location

The first thing you'll see is the general location and the number of manoeuvres the map will show you, click on the icon.



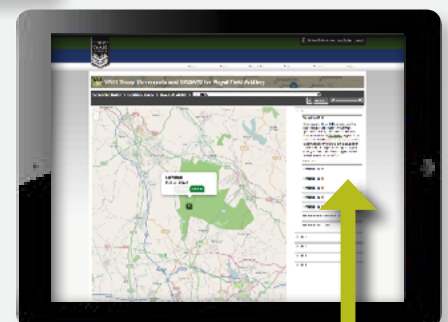
4 Tracking his unit

All locations will be shown by icons; blue icons show one manoeuvre, green icons indicate multiple manoeuvres, click on these to expand locations.



5 Seeing it mapped out, step by step, watch their journey evolve from place to place

Click on any blue icon and you'll see a 'Next' arrow and a 'Previous' arrow. These will walk



You'll also be able to read and hear information about what happened at each location.



YOUR JOURNEY: Navigating the maze that is online genealogy - at a glance!



STARTING POINTS

Talk to family members

Ask for additional information
- jobs, hobbies, groups
associated with

Check details are correct - is it
the right name, spelt correctly,
or a nickname?

Know where to search

Register on websites and forums,
join groups and more...

Learn how best to use search
engines

Go further afield

Research or visit the birth
town, churches, schools, local
libraries etc.

What's in your attic?

Look for documents,
certificates, official papers,
diaries or photos

**TIP: Get your
information verified**

**TIP: Get organised
- find the gaps**



STUMBLING BLOCKS

You've exhausted family members to speak to

Try variations on your name
search, spellings etc

Post a question on forums

Visit libraries and archive
centres

You've found the service record - is this all there is?

Look up hospital records

Was he a POW?

Hire a professional researcher

Search for his medal index
card at the National Archives

**Records are not available, for a
variety of reasons, especially if
they're WW2**

They may not be in the public domain

You might be looking in the wrong
place - try a different source

Do...

- Thank anyone who offers information - no matter how little. Often genealogists spend longer than you think to provide that one vital nugget!
- Share what you've found - it may help other family members with their research
- Have some fun - and recognise what you have achieved

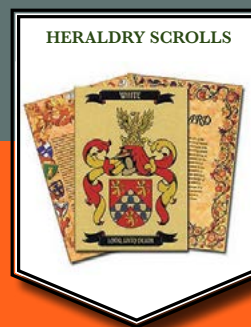
Don't...

- Publish information about living relatives
- Copy other people's family trees - it may not be entirely correct and will lead you down the wrong path
- Rely on just one information source
- Store all information in one place
- Ever lose hope!



HELPING YOU TO DISCOVER MORE
ABOUT YOUR MILITARY ANCESTOR

TODAY



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COMMUNICATIONS

Any submissions or queries regarding this magazine can be sent to the following e-mail address:

magazine@forces-war-records.co.uk

Alternatively, for company queries please use the help links available on the Forces War Records website at:

www.forces-war-records.co.uk

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Over two million records in our exclusive collections that you'll only find on our site, including:

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

...and many many more

