

British Army soldiers and officers in the First World War

This paid search guide will help you to decide whether to use The National Archives' paid search service.

What information can you find out?

We will always carry out a search of our records to a high standard based on our expertise and professionalism. With any search, there is never a guarantee that you will find the information you are looking for. There are often a number of possible reasons for an unsuccessful search, including the possibility that records were destroyed or lost, or that there are multiple records for individuals with identical names and we have insufficient information to distinguish between them.

Search 1: issue of campaign (or service) medals

This is a search for a medal index card, in record series WO 372, revealing which campaign medals, if any, a soldier received for service in the First World War. The search also includes consultation of the medal rolls, in record series WO 329, which may reveal the exact battalion in which a soldier served. This is not a search for information on gallantry medals, awarded for acts of bravery and heroism (see Search 4 for this).

A medal index card will reveal whether a soldier was granted any of the following medals:

- 1914 Star
- 1914-15 Star
- British War Medal
- Victory Medal
- Territorial Force War Medal
- Silver War Badge

You may also find out all or any of the following:

- unit(s) served in
- rank
- service number(s)
- theatre of war the soldier first served in
- date of entry to first theatre of war (usually only 1914-1915)

If we find several soldiers with the same name in the same unit, we will report this in our search results.

The soldier may have seen home service only. Only men serving overseas would be entitled to the main campaign medals covered by these records, except in exceptional circumstance.

In order to carry out this search we ideally need to know the soldier's regiment and regimental number. If the medals have survived this information should be inscribed on them.

Search 2a: service details of non-commissioned officers and other ranks (e.g. Private, Corporal, Sergeant, Gunner and Driver).

This is a search in record series [WO 363](#), [WO 364](#) and if appropriate [WO 400](#). The records in WO 363 and WO 364 can be accessed on the Ancestry website at www.ancestry.co.uk and those in WO 400 on the findmypast website at: <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>. Please note that this is a search of the digitised records on the Ancestry and findmypast websites. It does not include a search in the original documents. A successful search may reveal all, or some, of the following information about a soldier:

- age on enlistment
- place of birth or residence
- physical description

- any former service and occupation
- next of kin
- medical records
- date of enlistment
- postings
- promotions
- awards
- leave
- transfers
- date of discharge
- post-war employment and address

A service record is unlikely to provide precise details of a man's movements. Detail is generally limited to the theatre of war, for example "France", rather than specific actions or locations.

Only around a third of service records for non-officer ranks survive following the bombing of the War Office record repository in the Second World War.

For soldiers in the Household Cavalry, the majority of the surviving records mainly cover casualties (invalided or discharged dead).

If a soldier served in the Army after 1920, the records should be held by the Ministry of Defence. A seven-digit service number may indicate such post-First World War service.

Search 2b: service details of commissioned officers (e.g. Lieutenant, Captain and Major)

This is a search in record series WO 339 and WO 374. A successful search may reveal information on:

- length of service
- pensions for wounds
- correspondence relating to pay including settling of deceased officers' estates
- correspondence relating to promotions/relinquishment of commission

For officers promoted from the lower ranks the records can include attestation papers, which may include some or all of details listed above in 2a.

For officers who were still serving after 31 March 1922 or who had left the Army prior to that date but rejoined or were recalled for further service, for example in the Second World War, the records of service are still retained by the Ministry of Defence.

If this is already known to have occurred, you are advised to contact them first, before requesting us to undertake research.

The main series of officers' service records was destroyed by bombing in 1940, and what remains is a supplementary series of correspondence files in WO 339, though some of these were not kept, in which case no file will now exist.

Please note that the First World War records of medical practitioners (who were granted temporary commissions in the Royal Army Medical Corps) were all destroyed after 1920.

Search 3: unit war diaries

If successful, this search, in record series WO 95, reveals daily accounts of an Army unit's activity, although the level of detail varies. The war diaries do not normally mention the names of ordinary soldiers, though officers' names are mentioned fairly frequently, especially when they are killed or wounded.

We are unable to transcribe or summarise the entire contents of a war diary as they can cover the entire length of the war.

Search 4a: details of gallantry awards (VC, DSO, MC, and DCM)

This is a search in record series WO 98, WO 372, WO 388, WO 389, WO 390, WO 391 and ZJ 1, for details of the grants of the following medals and awards:

- Victoria Cross (VC)
- Distinguished Service Order (DSO)
- Military Cross (MC)
- Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)

It includes a search for the announcement of the award in the London Gazette, the official newspaper of the British State. A successful search for a VC, DSO, MC and DCM may include a citation (an account of why an individual was recommended for an award).

Search 4b: details of gallantry awards (MM, MSM, and MID)

- Military Medal (MM)
- Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)
- Mentions in Despatches (MIDs)

This is a search in the First World War Medal Index Cards, which record the date the award was gazetted, and the London Gazette. There are no citations for the MM, MSM or MIDs, just a one line entry in the London Gazette recording only name, rank, service number and regiment or unit.

If the award was a New Year or King's/Queen's Birthday Honour there is unlikely to be a citation as these were awarded for service over a period of time, rather than for individual acts of gallantry.

What are the charges?

Listed below are our standard charges for each search. However, the fee is likely to be higher than our standard charge if:

- you do not provide us with the essential information we need for a search
- the individual has a very common surname
- you want us to search on a variation of the individual's name (such as with or without middle names, or middle names used as first names)

We will only search for a name as you provide it to us. If you ask us to search for a Charles Marshall Burr, we will not search for Charles Burr. Similarly, if you ask us to search for a Fred Cheeseman, we will not search for Frederick Cheeseman.

Search 1

Standard charge: £56.04

This includes copies of any medal index card and associated medal roll(s).

Search 2a

Standard charge: £84.06. This charge is for a search of the digitised records on the Ancestry and findmypast websites. The charge does not include a search in the original documents.

Search 2b

Standard charge: £84.06

Search 3

Standard charge: £84.06 for a single month in a unit diary or five dated events and then £54.60 for each additional month or five dated events.

You may have independently located document references for a unit's war diaries and wish simply to pay for copies to be sent to you. However, there may be a paid search charge for locating a required date period within the diaries and "marking it up" ready for copying. This will usually be in addition to the copying fee.

Our standard charge for research and "marking up" is £84.06 per document reference.

Search 4a

Standard charge: £112.08

Search 4b

Standard charge: £84.06

What information do we need for a search?

Please send as much information as you can. The following details are either essential or desirable for a search at our standard charge:

Search 1, 2a and 2b

Essential	Desirable
Full name, including any middle names if applicable	rank, or at least whether soldier was a commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer or other rank
name of at least one unit or regiment	service number(s)
	whether soldier died in service
	date or year of birth
	place of birth
	place of residence on enlistment
	next-of-kin

Search 3

Essential	Desirable
the unit; either regiment <i>and</i> battalion, or corps <i>and</i> company/battery (examples of corps include Artillery, Engineers, Machine Gun and Army Service Corps)	
date(s) of event(s) which you wish us to locate (for example, the date of a soldier's death)	
OR	
a range of dates (months or years) within which to search for an individual or a specific event	

Search 4

Essential	Desirable
full name, including any middle names if applicable the medal awarded	year the award was won regiment, or unit served in

If you would like to request any of the paid searches listed in this guide, please contact us either by completing our [online enquiries form](#) or by completing one of our paper response forms.

You may decide, instead, to do the research yourself. For advice on conducting your own research you should consult the relevant research guides, accessible through our online [guidance index](#).

Research guidance

[British Army soldiers after 1913](#)

[British Army campaign and service medals](#)

[First World War diaries of the British Army](#)