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1. Destruction of British Army Service Records

- About 6-7 million men served as soldiers (other ranks) in the first world war
- Most of their service records were destroyed by enemy bombing in 1940.
- About 2 million service records either survived the bombing (in WO 363) or were reconstructed from pension records (in WO 364).
- As a result, you have about a 40% chance of finding the service records of a particular soldier. If you don't find anything, try the Campaign Medal Rolls for basic details (see the Research Guide: British Army Services: Campaign Medals, and other Service Medals for information).
- The First World War service records for soldiers and non-commissioned officers of the Household Cavalry have survived in their entirety. They were not stored with the other regiments' records which suffered the enemy bombing in 1940. The records of the Household Cavalry, including the Life Guards, Royal Horse Guards and Household Battalion are held in series WO 400 . Note that Microfilm copies of WO 400 are held at the Household Cavalry Museum, Combermere Barracks, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 3DN. Written enquiries are welcomed but enquirers are recommended to contact the Museum for access conditions before visiting in person.
- The guards regiments are places of deposit for their own records and these are accessible by writing to the appropriate Regimental Headquarters. Some of these records were destroyed by enemy bombing whilst stored in the Guards chapel during the second world war.

2. First World War only?

- The records in WO 363 and WO 364 are for soldiers who were discharged between 1914 and 1920. They include regular soldiers who may have enlisted as early as 1892 for 22 years' service. However, WO 363 and WO 364 also contain a small number of stray service records of pre-war soldiers who did not serve during 1914-1920.
- They do not include the discharge papers of
 - regular soldiers who continued in the army after 1920.
 - soldiers who transferred to another service, taking their service record with them.

3. What Documents Might I Find?

- The documents you are most likely to find include:
 - attestation papers (giving date of birth, next of kin, details of family members, address)
 - discharge papers,
 - medical records,
 - casualty form (active service) which can provide information relating to a man's movements.
- Examples and explanations of these are published in *First World War Army Service Records*.
- Many of the papers are difficult to read, as the ink is now very faint.

4. Where to Start

- You need to know name, rank, number and regiment.
- If you do not know these, you can get them from the First World War Medal Index Cards (WO 372), which are available on microfiche at The National Archives or from DocumentsOnline (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline).
- There are two series to look in
 - WO 364 for soldiers who were discharged to pension during the war.
 - WO 363 for soldiers who were killed, died or who survived the war.

5. WO 364 : Soldiers Discharged to Pension

- These service records relate to
 - discharges of regular soldiers at the end of their period of service. Men who signed up for the duration of the war did not get pensions: instead they got a gratuity on demobilisation, and will not be found here unless they received a pension on medical grounds.
 - discharges on medical and associated grounds, including those who died after the award of a pension.
- They are alphabetically arranged, but cannot be searched on line, as ranges of names are given in the catalogue (e.g. Bevan, Aidney - Beveridge, Andrew).

6. WO 363 : War Survivors and War Dead

- These service records relate to soldiers
 - killed in action.
 - died of wounds or disease without being discharged to pension.
 - demobilised at the end of the war.
- They are the 'burnt documents' that survived the bombing in 1940, and consist of about 20 to 25% of the original total.
- Records of service for soldiers who served after 1920 are held with the ministry of Defence, who may carry out a search for a fee. For further information contact: Ministry of Defence, Army Personnel Centre, Historic Disclosures, Mailpoint 400, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow, G2 8EX, tel: 0141-224-2023 and 0141-224-3303, e-mail: disc4.civsec@apc.army.mod.uk✉.

7. Other Records of the First World War

You may find the following research guides produced by The National Archives useful:

- For basic details about soldiers, try the campaign medal rolls, British Army Services: Campaign Medals, and other Service Medals.
- For gallantry awards, British Armed Services: Gallantry Medals.
- For details of actions, etc., British Army War Diaries: First World

War, 1914-1918.

- For trench maps, First World War, 1914-1918: Military Maps.

8. Soldier's Effects Ledgers at the Museum of Army Transport

While the National Archives holds the Soldier's Effects Ledgers for 1862-1880/1881 in WO 25/3475-3501, the relevant records for the First World War are now available but stored off-site at the Museum of Army Transport in Beverley, Yorkshire (two Soldier's Effects ledgers are held at the National Army Museum, but these cover earlier periods). There is no access at the Museum of Army Transport for the public but the National Army Museum will search on behalf of a reader for a £10 fee. The turnaround time can vary as it is only worthwhile for them to go up when they have enough enquiries to justify a trip/overnight stay. It is important to note that the ledgers are less detailed often recording only the next of kin as stated by regiment OR by will, date of death and cause of death.

9. The National Archives' Library Bibliography

The following recommended publications are available in the The National Archives' Library (www.library.nationalarchives.gov.uk/library). Where indicated a publication is also available to buy at The National Archives' Bookshop (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/bookshop).

- *The National Roll of the Great War, 1914-1918* (London, nd)
- *Soldiers died in the Great War 1914-19: a complete and searchable database* (Dallington, 1998)
- Ian F W Beckett, *The First World War: the essential guide to sources in the UK National Archives* (Richmond, 2002) - Available to buy
- Simon Fowler, *Tracing your First World War ancestors* (Newbury, 2003) - Available to buy
- Norman Holding and Iain Swinnerton, *The location of British Army*

- records 1914-1918* (Bury, 1999) - Available to buy
- Norman Holding and Iain Swinnerton, *World War I army ancestry* (Bury, 2003) - Available to buy
 - Imperial War Museum, *Tracing your family history: Army* (London, 1999)
 - E A James, *British regiments, 1914-1918* (Heathfield, 1998)
 - Naval and Military Press, *Soldiers died in the Great War 1914-19: a complete and searchable database* (Heathfield, 1998)
 - Gerald Oram, *Death sentences passed by military courts of the British Army, 1914-1924* (London, 2005)
 - Public Record Office, *Using army records* (Public Record Office Guides to Family History, 2000)
 - William Spencer, *Army service records of the First World War* (Public Record Office Readers' Guide, IXX, 2001) - Available to buy
 - Iain Swinnerton, *Identifying your World War I soldier from badges and photographs* (Bury, 2001) - Available to buy

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