

# What did my Granddad do in the War?

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**THIS IS A COMMON QUESTION.** And being a member of the Australian Army History Unit (AAHU) I get asked it a lot! What many people do not understand is that it is not the function of the AAHU to conduct such research on behalf of individuals. But regrettably, most individuals do not understand how to conduct their own research to find the answers. The fact is, however, that such research can be relatively easy – once you know how!

The main thing to understand is that the Government maintains the records. The first thing you must do is to try and get as much information together as you can before you start researching the records. Most important of all is to obtain the correct name, Unit, Service number and period of service of the person for whom you are searching. This in itself can be challenging as family history and folklore can blur facts. For instance: my grandfather Jim Heiman served in WW2. I have photos to prove it. However, if I search the WW2 nominal roll ([www.ww2roll.gov.au](http://www.ww2roll.gov.au)) I cannot find him. You see, whilst he served in the Australian forces during WW2 our family is of German descent. In fact, our family was interned at South West Rocks during WW1, and Granddad still suffered some intolerance himself after WW2. So he changed his name from Heimann to (a less Germanic-sounding) 'Heiman'. With this knowledge, instead of searching for Jim Heiman, I know that I need to look for Everard Eugene Luke Heimann – and then, Bingo! Corporal Heimann, number 24769, served in the Royal Australian Air Force. He enlisted on 7 Feb 1941 and discharged on 7 Feb 1946. I can now use this information to find out more ...

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) holds over a million Service records from both the first and second World Wars, from the Army (including 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> AIFs and the CMF) Navy and Air Force. These Service records usually include information on enlistment, postings, injuries and leave taken. Furthermore, these Service records have been digitised and are available on the internet through – [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au).

The NAA also hold other Service records. So if the record you are interested in is not digitised, you can write to them or even call on 1300 886 881.

But hang on ... what's this about Granddad being in the RAAF? I was told that Granddad served in the Lighthorse! Well he did – between the Wars in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lighthorse as a Trooper in 1936! And he has a different Service number! This puts a little more weight behind the importance of having your facts right from the beginning and also adding a pinch of salt into the stories you were told when you were a child. Memories slip and families embellish things.

One of the valuable side-effects of this type of research is what it can tell you about the nature of society during your forebears' lives. Just imagine what it must have felt like for Granddad – having served your country of birth in *both* the CMF and the RAAF and still feeling as though you should change your name for fear of persecution among your countrymen!

Family stories have also recounted that my Great Uncle Henry Beaumont died in Gallipoli. Up until a few years ago, I could not confirm this. I had previously found that there is a Henry Beaumont on the Roll of Honour, but this Sapper died in Belgium and was from Tasmania ... I must have had the wrong Henry. It wasn't until my mum did some digging around that I found out the truth. Henry Beaumont was involved in a little family feud and enlisted as Jack Burns!

Such name changes are common – particularly for underage enlistees. However some times they are accidental. A co-worker tells a story of his Grandfather. 1040 Private William Patterson Lawson enlisted on 25 March 1915 into the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion .... However the published AIF Embarkation Roll states Lawson – not Lowson! So too does the Australian War Memorial person search. What happened here no-one knows – was it a simple typo? A misunderstanding of accents or perhaps – some sloppy hand writing?

Needless to say, this is where the other information that you have gathered might well come in handy. Dates of birth, Unit and middle names can add clarity when other indicators start to fail. So, in short, there is no real 'One Stop Shop' for finding out what your granddad did in the War ... But once you have the name, Service number, Unit and period of Service, you're well on your way and it will all come in time.

The Australian War Memorial is a great place to research, with photographs, war diaries, nominal rolls and private records. Don't forget also Unit histories. A great number of Units have independently written their own Unit histories. Other eager authors have also gathered supplementary information on Units. In my own case, I found my granddad's Lighthorse Unit through the book 'The N.S.W Northern Rivers Lancers' by Martin Buckley. Additionally my maternal grandfather's unit the 2/1 Pioneer Battalion has its war history printed in a fantastic book full of detail.

Further info on searching for members who served in the Great War can be found on the AIF Project web page on <http://www.aif.adfa.edu.au:8080/index.html>.

As for medals – this information is available through the Directorate of Honours and Awards. They can be contacted by mail, phone or email. (1800 111 321, [dpe.honoursandawards@defence.gov.au](mailto:dpe.honoursandawards@defence.gov.au))

I hope this info helps ... and happy hunting!

