

Radar research in Australia during World War II

The successful use of radar by the Allied forces altered the course of World War II. Much of the initial research into radar technology was conducted in Britain, but in an effort to boost the Allies' defences, research findings were shared with other Commonwealth nations and the United States. These countries then began their own research. Australian scientists successfully developed new radar techniques and advances upon existing theories which ultimately played a significant part in the Allies' victory.

The Radiophysics Advisory Board

Research into radar or radio location technology in Australia was coordinated by the Radiophysics Advisory Board established within the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The main series of correspondence records created by the Board which document this research are held in the National Archives' Sydney Office. These are listed below.

The Board's activities are also documented within the records of the CSIR and its successor, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). Some examples of relevant series, held in the National Office, Canberra, are listed below.

Canberra – Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CA 486)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1916–27	A8510
Correspondence files	1927–81	A9778
Volumes of minutes of the Council	1926–49	A10090
Collection of files relating to the Radio Research Board and the Radiophysics Advisory Board	1926–71	A10762

Sydney – Radiophysics Advisory Board (CA 488)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Wartime radar files	1939–45	C3823

Correspondence files	1939–45	C3825
Correspondence and meeting files	1939–45	C4672
Folder of minutes	1939–45	C4968
Minutes of the Technical Committee	1942–45	C4969

Sydney – CSIR Division of Radiophysics (CA 4374)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Wartime radar research files	1939–45	C4634
Radiophysics Laboratory drawings	1939–96	C5133
Radiophysics Laboratory sketches	1941–68	C5135
Radiophysics Laboratory sketches (experimental)	1942–88	C5134

Other significant records about radar research

Additional information about radar research may be found in the records of a number of other agencies. The most important of these was the Prime Minister's Department, which was the parent department of the CSIR. Information is also held in the records of Sir Frederick Shedden, the wartime Secretary of the Department of Defence, and the Australian High Commission, London. Some examples of these records, held in the National Office, Canberra, and the Australian War Memorial, are listed below.

National Office, Canberra

Prime Minister's Department (CA 12)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1934–50	A461
Radio Physics Laboratory	1939–43	A461, Q398/1/5
CSIR employment of scientists during wartime	1940–41	A461, L398/1/1
Correspondence files	1939–47	A1608
Radio-Physics Investigations	1939–40	A1608, W25/1/2 part 1
Radio-Physics Investigations	1941	A1608, W25/1/2 part 2
Radio-Physics Investigations	1941–44	A1608, W25/1/2 part 3

Department of Defence (CA 46)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Records of Sir Frederick Shedden</u>	1937–71	A5954
<u>Despatch of officers to the United Kingdom for course in RDF work</u>	1940	A5954, 677/2
<u>Radar a report of science at war</u>	1945	A5954, 2064/29

Australian High Commission, United Kingdom (CA 241)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1920–68	A2908
<u>Radio Direction Finding *</u>	1939–41	A2908, R73 part 1
<u>Radio Direction Finding*</u>	1940–41	A2908, R73 part 2A
<u>Radio Direction Finding *</u>	1941–42	A2908, R73 part 2B
<u>Radio Direction Finding *</u>	1942	A2908, R73 part 3

*These items document the wartime liaison between the Australian and British governments on radar research.

Australian War Memorial

Department of Defence [III]

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Radar and other electronic devices – development – an account of the development and use of radar in the RAAF</u>	1946	AWM54, 810/2/2

Individuals associated with radar development in Australia

The National Archives also holds information about some of the individuals associated with the development of radar in Australia during World War II. These include Sir John Madsen and Sir Daniel McVey, who both served as Chairman of the Radiophysics Advisory Board, Professor Frederick White, who was Deputy Chairman of the Radiophysics Advisory Board and chaired its Technical Committee, scientists Professor David Martyn and Dr John Piddington, and Noel Brodribb, who, as Controller-General of Munitions Supply, had responsibility for the production of radar equipment.

Biographical information about these individuals and hundreds of other Australian scientists is available on the [Encyclopedia of Australian Science](#).

Locating additional records

Search the collection to locate additional material of interest. Use the series and item numbers listed in the tables above to scroll through lists of items held for those series. Or you can use the surnames of the individuals listed above as keyword searches, as well as terms such as 'radio', 'radar', 'RDF', 'radiophysics' and 'CSIR'.

For further information about records relating to radar production please see *Fact sheet 126 - Radar production and use during World War II*.