Navy service records

The Department of Defence assumed control of naval defence on Federation in 1901 and maintained Navy personnel records until the Navy Office was established in 1911. Most records of Navy service held by the National Archives date from 1911.

Navy service records held in Canberra

Service cards

The service card was the main record maintained by the Navy about serving members from 1911 until 1970. These cards provide a summary of service including postings, promotions, awards and personal details (including next of kin), and were added to over the member's entire period in the Navy. Cards were maintained for service in the Royal Australian Navy, the Women's Royal Australian Navy Service, the Naval Reserve, the Naval Volunteer Reserve, the Naval Nursing Services, Naval Dockyard Police, members enlisted or on loan, duty or exchange from the Royal Navy, and reservists voluntarily serving for a continuous period in excess of 28 days.

Confidential reports on officers

Confidential reports on Naval officers date from 1912 and were an annual report about officers' performance and suitability for promotion. As some of this information may be personally sensitive, confidential reports are not always available for public access.

Correspondence files

Separate files were created for each serving member to cover matters such as allowances, postings, promotions, discipline and long service. Up to 30 files could have been created on an individual member. The main Navy correspondence file series covers the period 1958 to 1974. Correspondence records for earlier service are listed on *Fact sheet 138 - Navy service records held in Melbourne*.

Reference numbers will often be located on the service card. Many of these files, especially for earlier years, were destroyed once they ceased to be of administrative use. Since 1968 Navy personnel files have been kept. These files are arranged by service number with a numeric prefix indicating the type of file.

World War I service with the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force and the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train

Service records for those who served with the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force and the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train are included in the series containing the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) personnel dossiers (see table below).

War gratuity cards for World War I and World War II

Most members of the naval forces who returned from World War I and World War II were eligible for a war gratuity or bonus (paid as cash or an issue of government bonds) in recognition of their service. All applications following World War I service are listed on RecordSearch and searches of the series CP979/2 using the name of the member should identify a record of interest. Applications for World War II are not fully listed and the series cannot be effectively searched unless you know the member's gratuity number.

Merchant Navy service

The National Archives holds microfilmed employment records for Australian seamen who served on Australian merchant vessels. The microfilms have been digitised. The records are arranged by family name and give some personal information, the name of ships and dates of service.

Additional sources

Other sources of information about those who had Navy service include crew lists, published Navy Lists, records of service with the Royal Australian Navy Reserve (to 1912), lists of naval appointments and discharges (1912–31) and nominal rolls of Naval personnel during World War II.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has prepared online databases that include details of all who had RAN service during World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Navy service records held in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Royal Australian Naval Reserve (RANR) – record of service forms – Citizen's Naval Forces (RANR record of service forms are held in series CT190/1 to CT190/50. This link will take you to series CT190/1)	1897–1912	CT190/1
Volumes of service records of officers (appointments, service and discharge)	1912–31	A8363
Ships' ledgers, HMA ships (includes crew lists)	1911–56	A4624
Service cards – Navy officers	1911–70	A6769
Service cards – Petty officers and men	1911–70	A6770
Confidential reports – Naval officers	1912–	A3978
First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) personnel dossiers (includes Australian Naval & Military	1914–20	B2455

Expeditionary Force and Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train)		
Applications for war gratuity – World War I service	1920–39	CP979/2
War gratuity forms – World War II service (the war gratuity number is needed if these forms are to be to used effectively)	1939–45	CP979/1
Nominal rolls of Naval personnel	1949	A9951
National Service cards for RANR	1950–65	A12907
Navy correspondence files	1958–74	A1813
Naval personnel files	1968–	A2440
Microfilmed employment records – Australian Merchant Seaman	1922–83	A8877

For more information

Records of pre-World War I and colonial service

Australian Naval Forces service records from 1901 to 1913 are held by the Australian War Memorial.

Records of personnel who served with colonial navies before 1901 may be held by the relevant state government archives, please see *Fact sheet 2 - Addresses of Australian archival institutions* for their contact details.

Fact sheets:

- *Fact sheet 63 – War service information*
- *Fact sheet 177 - World War I and World War II service records*