

Who's Your Mob – First Nations Family History

Military records

About Military Records

Military records are very detailed and can assist in finding information about family members. They can be searched across the Australian Army, Navy and Air Force and Department of Defence. The record of service is detailed information on a person's career in the defence force.

First Nations peoples have served in military conflicts since the Boer War. Their military records provide valuable information for family history researchers.

During the Boer War and the First World War, many First Nations Queenslanders wanted to enlist for a chance to earn a wage and an opportunity to travel. The Defence Act initially excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from enlisting, resulting in many First Nations peoples enlisting under assumed ethnicity or cultural backgrounds. Some even changed their names, place of birth and other personal details.

Military service information can be found in several locations and organisations.

Searching for First Nations Military History

State Library of Queensland

State Library's collections include stories, photographs, memorabilia and blogs relating to First Nations service personnel from the Boer War, First World War, Second World War and more.

During the First World War, many Queensland soldiers had their photographs taken at Enoggera prior to embarkation. State Library has digitised the more than 30,000 soldier portraits that were published in *The Queenslander*. You can find these images via our [One Search catalogue](#).

To find information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queensland soldiers search online in our [One Search catalogue](#) by using the following phrases:

- Aboriginal soldiers portraits,
- Aboriginal Australian Soldiers – Queensland,
- Indigenous soldiers or
- Indigenous servicemen.

For the best results choose "State Library Collections" and/or "State Library Digital Collections".

Some of the available material can only be requested to view in the John Oxley Library Heritage Collections area on level 4. The records are stored in archival envelopes and boxes and may be quite fragile. In some cases, there are online digitised versions that can be accessed and read through the One Search catalogue.

State Library has many Queensland newspapers on microfilm on level 3 that can be searched. There are also databases for military records. The following databases are accessible and free onsite at State Library:

- Ancestry (Library edition)
- FindMyPast
- FamilySearch (affiliate records) (Access with your personal FamilySearch membership)

State Library's First Nations Soldier blogs can be found on the website under [First Nations culture](#) [State Library > Discover > Blog > First Nations culture]. Use search words such as

- [Aboriginal soldiers](#),
- [Indigenous soldiers](#),
- [Indigenous enlistment](#), or
- [Black diggers](#).

See also:

- [Century of Service](#) – Explore collections, blog posts and research about wartime history.
- Webinar – [Black Diggers Webinar 24 April 2020](#)
- Blog – [Pte William Elsdale /Ellsdale /Elisdale 1896-1916](#)
Billy Elsdale was the only Queensland Police tracker to volunteer in the First World War. He is also 'believed to be the first Aboriginal digger to die during action in France.'
- Blog – [Queensland's memorial rolls of the Great War](#)
- [Queensland's Indigenous Servicemen Digital Story and Oral History](#).
"This collection contains a digital story and an oral history undertaken as part of State Library's QANZAC100 project. The oral history is an interview with Des Crump. Des discusses Queensland's Indigenous servicemen of the First World War. The interviews explore the contribution and experiences of Indigenous Queenslanders during the First World War. Despite the oppressive policies and practices of the Protection Era, between 1,250 and 1,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women volunteered for the AIF." – State Library catalogue record

Anzac Square & Memorial Galleries

[Anzac Square & Memorial Galleries](#) commemorates and showcases stories of First Nations people who have served. Visit in person or online to learn more and to remember them. Anzac Square & Memorial Galleries has a wonderful collection of [stories](#) and photographs of First Nations peoples in military service and conflicts. [Anzac Square and Memorial Galleries > Stories > Topic: First Nations]

History Pin: Q ANZAC 100: MEMORIES FOR A NEW GENERATION - Indigenous enlistment

This [History Pin collection](#) relates to First Nations peoples who enlisted in WWI. Each entry includes a brief biography of the soldier's life and links to further information.

National Archives of Australia

[National Archives of Australia](#) (NAA) holds records of Australian service men and women. You can search NAA for the service records of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who served in the Australian Defence Force in all conflicts. [Explore the collection > Go to Record Search > Name Search Tab]

The records include many details such as address, age, place of enlistment, next of kin, place of birth and the person's full service history. Some of the files have photographs and physical descriptions, and can include correspondence between the soldiers' next of kin and the Department of Defence advising of wounds, death of the person serving, awards and medals.

Some service records have been digitised, so you may be able to view a digital copy of the record of service. This can be downloaded or viewed online. For more information, see NAA's webpage on [Defence and service records](#).

Australian War Memorial

The [Australian War Memorial](#) holds records on military units and their operations. You can also find information on service personnel who served in conflicts, including the Boer War, First World War, Second World War, Korean War and Vietnam War. The Australian War Memorial also holds photographs, film and more.

You can find a person by searching the lists or by scrolling down to “Indigenous Service” to browse or search the names of known First Nations service personnel to find their service number, unit and conflict. [Australian War Memorial > People > [Indigenous Service](#)]

For more information:

- [Indigenous service | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](#)
- Research guide, [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military service](#).
- [Indigenous service in Australia's armed forces in peace and war](#)

Department of Veterans’ Affairs

The Australian Government’s [Department of Veterans’ Affairs](#) (DVA) has webpages devoted to First Nations peoples, providing resources and links. They hold medical and dental records and publish searchable nominal rolls, which are lists of people who served in conflicts in which Australia was involved. For more information, visit DVA’s webpage for Indigenous Veterans [Department of Veterans’ Affairs > Get Support > [For Indigenous Veterans](#)].

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission [website](#) can help you find war graves, cemeteries and memorials for service personnel who died overseas during the First and Second World Wars. You can search by name, service number, regiment and war to find results and see grave details. [Commonwealth War Graves Commission > Find Records > [Find War Dead](#)]

TROVE digitised newspapers

Trove contains [digitised historical newspapers](#), which include articles, notices and photos of soldiers, regiments, and conflicts. Search using phrases such as 'Aboriginal soldier' or 'Aboriginal Digger' or using the person’s name. You can search newspapers up to the end of 1954.

Other useful websites:

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

The [AIATSIS](#) guide to Military service records provides an understanding of what a military record is as well as where to look for information online and in books. [AIATSIS > Family History Sources > Official Records > [Military Service Records](#)]

Community and Personal Histories – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services

[Community and Personal Histories](#) team can help you to access historical records relating to your family history.

Need further information?

(07) 3840 7810 | slq.qld.gov.au/ask

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