



Tracing Prisoners of War

The Imperial War Museum does not hold any official documentation or comprehensive listings of Prisoners of War, but it does have extensive material that will be helpful for providing information and understanding about their experience. This leaflet should be used in conjunction with the relevant leaflet for the individual's branch of service – Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy or Merchant Navy. The Department of Printed Books welcomes visitors by appointment (Monday to Saturday, from 10am to 5pm). Other reference departments in the Museum - Art, Documents, Exhibits and Firearms, Film and Photograph Archives, and the Sound Archive - may also be able to assist. Advance appointments are required.

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Where to Find Prisoner of War Records

Records of prisoners of war (POWs) were compiled by each national branch of the Red Cross and are now all held centrally by the **Archives Division and Research Service, International Committee of the Red Cross, 19 Avenue de la Paix, CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland**. Because of their personal nature, these records are not accessible to the general public but paid searches can be conducted (currently 80 Swiss Francs an hour) – please be patient as this may take some time. Second World War or later searches, carried out for former prisoners or their next of kin may be free of charge. You will need to know the **full name** and **nationality** of the individual you are researching. Additional details such as regiment, number, place and date of birth, date of capture and name of father are likely to aid your enquiry. More information is available on the website at www.icrc.org/eng (click on Info Resources, and then ICRC Archives information Sources – an electronic application form can be found under 'Requests for personal [sic] data').

Some details about those who died in captivity during both World Wars will be held by the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**. The computerised database **Debt of Honour** can be accessed on the website at www.cwgc.org. The Commission can be contacted at **2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7DX (Tel: 01628 507200)**.

Any official documentation relating to British POWs is held by **The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU (Tel: 020 8876 3444; Website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)**. More information about these records can be found in the research guides **British Prisoners of War, c1760 – 1919** and **British Prisoners of War, 1939 – 1953** on the website. The interviews and reports provided by repatriated or escaped prisoners from the First World War in record class **WO 161** can now be viewed online at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/pow.asp Although more than 3,000 individuals are represented, this is only a small percentage of those who were held captive.

Sources at the Department of Printed Books of the Imperial War Museum include autobiographies and camp journals, although inevitably some locations are better documented than others. Please contact us to find out more about the particular camps you are interested in, or have a look on the Museum's Collections Online database at www.iwmcollections.org.uk Items can be viewed by appointment (Monday-Saturday from 10am to 5pm) in the Reading Room (shared with the Department of Documents and the Sound Archive - anyone visiting should also check their holdings). The following items may be helpful for starting your research.

First World War

The ***List of British Officers Taken Prisoner in the Various Theatres of War Between August 1914 and November 1918***, compiled by the military agents Cox and Co in 1919 will prove helpful if you are seeking an individual who was commissioned. Another useful source is the monthly ***Enquiry Lists*** issued by the **Enquiry for the Wounded and Missing Department** of the **British Red Cross and Order of St John**. Our holdings of this are not complete, with better coverage for some periods than others.

The Department of Printed Books also holds a set of ***War Office Weekly Casualty Lists*** from August 1917 to March 1919 that contain references to killed, wounded and captured servicemen. This is a difficult source to use and does not yield much information for those seeking prisoners.

The Department of Printed Books' ***Women's Work Collection*** contains some information about soldiers and non-commissioned officers who were taken prisoner before Christmas 1914, and were therefore eligible to receive Princess Mary's Gift Box. These lists are arranged by regiment in sections BO 2 1/11 – BO 2 1/328. Already available commercially on microfilm, the collection is now available as a searchable web database (by paid subscription to Thomson Gale (***Women, War and Society, 1914-1918***) or free at point of access within the Museum).

A reprint of ***Map of the Main Prison Camps in Germany and Austria*** is available for £5.00. This map gazetteer compiled by Mrs Pope-Hennessey shows the principal Central Powers prisoner of war camps in Germany and Austria, and was published by Nisbet and Co during the First World War.

Second World War

Three useful volumes have been reprinted by John Hayward in conjunction with the Department of Printed Books. These are nominal rolls of POWs held in Germany and German Occupied Territories, corrected up to the end of March 1945. Volume one is entitled ***Prisoners of War: British Army 1939-1945: Alphabetical Nominal Registers (Including Rank, POW Number, Regiment or Corps and Camp Location Details) Listing Over 107,000 British Army Prisoners of War of All Ranks Held in Germany and German Occupied Territories***. Volume two covers ***Armies and Other Land Forces of the British Empire*** and volume three covers ***Naval and Air Forces of Great Britain and the Empire***.

Two recent publications covering RAF prisoners are ***Footprints on the Sands of Time: RAF Bomber Command Prisoners-of-War in Germany 1939-1945*** by Oliver Clutton-Brock (London: Grub Street, 2003) and ***Unsung Heroes of the Royal Air Force: the Far East Prisoners of War 1941-1945*** by Les and Pam Stubbs (Grantham, Lincolnshire: Barry Books, 2002).

Probably the best single volume work dealing with POWs generally is ***Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939 – 1945: Prisoners of War*** by W Wynne Mason (Wellington, New Zealand: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1954).

Issues of ***The Prisoner of War: the Official Organ of the Prisoners of War Department of the Red Cross and St John War Organisation***, contain interesting background information, particularly about activities in POW camps in Occupied Europe.

For those interested in prisoners in the Far East, ***Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II: Statistical History, Personal Narratives, and Memorials Concerning POWs in Camps and Hellships, Civilian Internees, Asian Slave Laborers and Others Captured in the Pacific Theater*** by Van Waterford (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1994) provides helpful guidance, information about the camps and suggestions for further reading.

Korean War

Prisoners of War Korea, 1950 – 1953: the British Army compiled by Peter Gaston (London: London Stamp Exchange, 1976) lists men taken prisoner.

Useful Contacts

There are too many worthwhile organisations to list here and we would suggest that enquirers contact us for advice on addresses, including details of the various branches and regional Far East Prisoner of War associations.

The following have websites that contain helpful links to other sites as well as useful information:

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association:

www.prisonerofwar.org.uk

Royal Air Forces Ex-POW Association website:

www.rafinfo.org.uk/rafexpow

COFEPOW (Children (and Families) of the Far East Prisoners of War) website:

www.cofepow.org.uk