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The Royal Marines Museum is grateful to the Fleet Air Arm Museum for being able to preserve these records, and to the staff who administer and make them available for research.

ROYAL MARINES SERVICE DOCUMENTS **IN THE ARCHIVE OF THE FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM**

By Captain RC Swales RN

In 1995 the Fleet Air Arm Museum (FAAM) at the Royal Naval Air Station, Yeovilton, Somerset assumed custody of a large number of Service Documents from the Ministry of Defence (Navy Records) at Hayes. The majority of records are those of non-commissioned personnel who served in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines before about 1925, the earliest records dating from the 1860s. Also at Yeovilton are the papers of most of the men who were enlisted for short service 'hostilities only' during WW1.

The following are the main categories of these documents now held in the FAAM archive:-

Royal Marines

- Royal Marines Light Infantry - Plymouth Division Continuous Service
(RMLI) Plymouth Division Short Service
Portsmouth Division Continuous Service
Chatham Division Continuous Service
Chatham Division Short Service
- Royal Marine Artillery (RMA) - RMA
RMA Portsmouth Short Service
- Royal Naval Division - Divisional Engineers, Divisional Train, RM Medical Unit and Ordnance Company - all Deal Short Service
- RM Band Service
- Royal Marines Labour Corps (RMLC)

Royal Navy

- Continuous Service (CS), Non-Continuous Service (NCS), and Short Service (SS) engagements, including Seamen, Stokers, Artificers, Artisans, Ship's Police.

Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve

- RNVR Divisions (Bristol, Clyde, London, Mersey, Sussex, Tyneside and Wales Divisional Companies and 'Z' ratings).
- 'Kitchener's Army' entrants to Crystal Palace/RND ('KP', 'KW' and 'KX' ratings).
- Civilian entrants to RND ('ZW' and 'ZX' ratings).
- Army entrants to RND ('R' ratings).
- RNVR entrants at Crystal Palace ('PZ' and 'ZP' ratings).
- Anti-aircraft Corps ('AA' ratings).
- Motor Boat Section ('MB' ratings).

Royal Naval Reserve (FAAM custody assumed in 2003)

- Record cards for many RNR categories

Although those with an interest in the Royal Marines will be naturally drawn to the records of the men who served in the RMLI and/or RMA, the other records are important because they often contain information on parts of a man's service career outside the Royal Marines. For example, although most RNVN volunteers during WW1 found themselves serving as naval ratings with the MEF or BEF as part of the Royal Naval Division (RND), many ratings were transferred to the RM to serve in units in the RND such as the Divisional Train, Ordnance Company or as RM Cyclists. Men who enlisted in the RMLI often transferred later to the Royal Navy and continued their service as, for example, stokers or ship's police. Of particular interest to the FAAM are those Royal Marines (and naval ratings) who moved across to the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) in the very early days of naval aviation. Some of these men were involved in the building of the first British rigid airship, the Admiralty's R.1 (also known as "*MAYFLY*"), in 1911. Some were commissioned as RNAS pilots and observers. Many of these ex-Marines of the RNAS transferred to the fledgling Royal Air Force in 1918, some as aircraft mechanics, some in supporting trades. Even within the Royal Marines transfers were commonplace, some RMLI men serving in all three Divisions, often more than once, and others moved to and from the Band Service and the RMA.

It is regrettable that the dispersion of records from MOD Hayes has resulted in some RM records (including some Portsmouth CS, all Portsmouth SS and many RMLC) being stored in the National Archives at Kew. It is also known that there are many examples of papers at Kew being misfiled, RMA and RMLI records being mixed together. The Portsmouth Division papers at Kew appear to have suffered from drastic 'weeding' at some stage and the papers are, unhelpfully for the researcher, filed by year of discharge and surname. There appears to be no clear justification for this splitting of the RM records, which will merely serve to complicate the work of the researcher.

RM SERVICE PAPERS

RM papers are unbound. Instead, the records (sometimes referred to as "Attestation Packs") are loose-filed in bundles or boxes in order of Service Number. In contrast to the RN/RNVN ledgers (described later), they generally present a much more extensive record of a man's service from attestation to discharge, with a wealth of data in between. A description of the type of information contained in many of the RM records is presented below to give readers a feel for what may be available. An individual's papers might include:-

- Original RM Attestation.
- Army Attestation of those who were conscripted or transferred.
- Letters of release and recommendations from civilian employers.
- Appeals against conscription.
- Original arithmetic, handwriting and dictation tests.
- Examination questions and worked answers for RM Gunner.
- Records of medical examination on entry and during service.
- Active Service Casualty Forms (Army Forms B.103).
- RND Record Cards. Very few cards of RMLI men serving in the RND are in the main RND card index at the FAAM (see below).
- Conduct Record Sheets – often for a whole career and with extensive lists of offences.

- Various discharge papers, including parchment discharge certificates of those with previous service.
- Invaliding Medical Record.
- Hurt Certificate.
- Report of Accidental Wounding.
- Report of death in action.
- Service Certificates.
- National Health Insurance card.
- Declaration of alias.
- Court Paternity Orders and other Court papers.
- Correspondence to/from military authorities, including letters from next-of-kin.
- Records of inquiries conducted in the field, often including original witness statements written in Field Notebooks.
- WW1 Ration Book.
- Unemployment stamp book.
- Active Service Will.
- List of effects at death.
- Naval Pay Book. The records of the many pensioners recalled for service on the outbreak of WW2 usually retain their WW2 Pay Book, with photograph.
- Army Pay Book from previous Army service – some have been found to contain Army identification discs (dog-tags).

The above list is by no means exhaustive. The documents as a whole give a remarkable snapshot of military life and contemporary society in the first decades of the 20th Century. Those of individuals can give an amazingly detailed record of their service in the Royal Marines. The amount of detail in the records held at the FAAM shows how comprehensive the RM records were and how destructive the administrative ‘weeding’ on certain records held at Kew has been. Even amongst the FAAM records there is evidence of this destructive process: the Conduct Record Sheets have been removed from the Plymouth Division CS records. Fortunately they were boxed separately and survived. The museum now has the task of sorting them and re-uniting them with the parent files. Inevitably there are some gaps where records are missing. Many of these are probably are as-yet-unidentified inter-Division, or inter-Service transfers. It is known, however, that the papers of many men who had completed their twelve-year limited engagement and were recalled during WW1 from the Royal Fleet Reserve (RFR) are often absent. The whereabouts of these RFR papers is unknown.

NAVAL SERVICE PAPERS

RN and RNVR papers are bound in volumes (Engagement Ledgers) in Service Number order and the principal documents to be found therein are original attestation/enlistment papers. However, some individual records can be more extensive. In particular, the RNVR records of ratings who served with the RND usually contain original Active Service Casualty Forms (Army Form B.103), the contents of which were typed onto the RND Record Cards. The originals of these Record Cards have now also been transferred to the FAAM. The microfiche version is still available in the National Archive (formerly the Public Record Office) at Kew under ADM/339. Summaries of RND Service and Courts Martial records are among the other papers which are sometimes also bound in with an RNVR rating’s records.

CURRENT STATUS

Many of the records received from the MOD are/were in poor condition, some having been neglected and badly stored for decades in damp conditions. Some had been damaged by fire. Some parchment documents seem to have attracted rodents, with their teeth marks much in evidence. It was noted that the papers of RM deserters, in particular, had suffered fire and water damage, indicating that they had all been stored together at some time in the past. No index of the records existed. A continuing programme of work is underway at the FAAM to ensure that the many hundreds of thousands of papers (the RMLI Continuous Service papers alone cover some 63,000 service numbers) are properly cared for and indexed but this is a very long-term effort and much still remains to be done. At the simplest level, indexing will allow the papers to be searched either by surname or Service Number but other data is recorded such as date of enlistment, date and place of birth and cause of discharge. Conservation and indexing has been completed on Portsmouth CS, Plymouth and Chatham SS as well as the Deal SS men of the RND. Plymouth and Chatham CS and RMB are currently in progress. No RMA records have yet been dealt with. In the course of conservation, thousands of pins, staples and paperclips, which have rusted into the documents, have been removed, damaged papers have been repaired and large numbers of misfiled papers have been put back in their correct place.

The FAAM is privileged to be the custodian of such a priceless collection of personnel records.



THE SERVICE DOCUMENTS OF THE SHORT SERVICE RECRUITS (1914-1918) INTO THE ROYAL MARINES LIGHT INFANTRY, CHATHAM DIVISION, HELD IN THE ARCHIVE OF THE FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

The following gives a flavour of the sort of information that can be drawn from the RM records and FAAM database. The data is recorded from the Chatham Division Short Service papers, which span Service Numbers Chatham/1(S) to 3512(S). Sets of papers associated with about 3,320 individuals are held in this archive. Not all Service Numbers are held: about 190 Service Numbers have no associated papers. In some cases where the papers are not held in the archive, the name belonging to a Service Number is known from other sources (and is shown in the museum's indexes). Some Service Numbers were probably not used, or the recruits concerned were never entered into the RMLI for some reason. Several transfers between RMLI Divisions are evident. More inter-Division transfers, and many papers which have been misfiled by MOD, are coming to light as archiving continues. The records are stored in Service Number order.

Most of the initial recruits (given Service Numbers Chatham/1 – 200(S)) were early volunteers for Kitchener's Army on the outbreak of WW1. These men were transferred to the RMLI in mid-September 1914, all from the Sherwood Foresters. From then, until the introduction of conscription and again towards the end of the War, the RMLI enlisted directly through their own recruiting offices.

The great majority of the Chatham Division (S) men served at some time in the Royal Naval Division at Gallipoli (most, but not all, in Chatham Battalion) and/or in France (in both 1st and 2nd RMLI Battalions and other units). Many were later withdrawn from the RND (often after being wounded) and returned to the Chatham Division RMLI for service in HM Ships and shore bases. Many others served with the RND to the end of the war.

A significant number fought with the 4th Battalion RMLI, specially formed for the Zeebrugge raid on 23rd April 1918, where they sustained many casualties. Many more were drafted to the 3rd Battalion RMLI which formed the RM Garrison in the Aegean Islands after the RND garrison brigades left to join the BEF in France in Spring 1916. A few fought the Bolsheviks as part of the RM Field Force in North Russia in late 1918. Towards the end of the war most recruits were not drafted to the RND and, in particular, more than 100 older men (in their forties) were entered for employment on Home Coastal Defence. Most of the last 200 Service Numbers were given to Continuous Service men who had joined in the earliest months of the war. They were transferred to Short Service at the end of the war and almost immediately demobilised. The Chatham Division Short Service also included men who were recruited or transferred into the Royal Marines Submarine Miners, some 450 in total.

The approximately 3,320 sets of records yielded the following information on the service of the Chatham Division (S) Royal Marines:

- Well over half of the men served with the Chatham Division RMLI (in many cases this meant with the RND) until they were demobilised at the end of the war, most in early 1919. Very few of the RND Marines survived to their date of demobilisation without being either wounded or ill in the field. Of those demobilised well over 100 had been prisoners-of-war.
- About 135 Chatham (S) Marines were prisoners-of-war of the Germans, some of these (just over 10%) dying in the camps and a smaller number being repatriated during the war because of their wounds for subsequent invaliding. Most prisoners, however, did not come home until after the Armistice.
- More than 420 men were invalided from the Service either as a result of wounds received in action or for other medical reasons (e.g. epilepsy, tuberculosis). The reasons are usually detailed in their papers.
- More than 80 men were discharged from the RMLI before the Armistice to return to their former civil employment, mostly in the coal mines, shipbuilding, or in the armaments industry.
- Some 50 Marines were discharged dead for reasons other than combat injuries (mostly of disease), nearly a third of these dying in captivity.
- About 20 Marines were discharged from the RMLI to other Services and more than 40 were discharged to take up Commissions in the Royal Marines, Royal Navy or Army.
- About 13 were discharged because they were under-age and had lied about their date of birth at attestation, although several who had joined under-age were retained because they had reached legal age when detected.
- 32 men deserted the Service and were not recovered, their papers being marked "Run".
- About 480 men (around 15%) were discharged dead, the majority killed in action with the Royal Naval Division.



Access to the FAAM archive. The papers described above are available to the public by prior arrangement. It will normally be wise to check in advance that the Service Number sought is in the series held by the FAAM and is not among those held, for example, by the National Archive. However, because many documents can, at present, be accessed only by Service Number until a complete system of cross-indexing is in place, it is not always possible for the FAAM to provide a Service Number for a given name. Those who wish to examine papers should contact:-

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