



The Great War. A Guide to the Service Records of All the World's Fighting Men and Volunteers. [World War I]

Christina K. Schaefer

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World War I has passed from living memory into the history books, receding far enough into the distance to provide a genealogical challenge. In order to reconstruct the lives and locate the records of those who served, fought, volunteered, or were conscripted, we must rely on a vast but relatively unknown body of resources. Counting all combatants, the number of men who served in the Great War runs into the millions; needless to say, finding records on them in the two dozen countries that participated in the war is a daunting and laborious task--now made infinitely simpler with the publication of this magnificent guide to WWI service records. The only book of its kind, this ambitious effort to catalogue service records and related sources is international in scope, covering the soldiers of all countries participating in the war, from Britain, Germany, and France, to Russia, Canada, and the U.S.; and from India, Australia, and Japan, to South Africa and Brazil! This is a key to a motherlode of genealogical data and should grow in value as our need for WWI-era information increases. Right now it represents a whole new path in genealogical research, with fresh possibilities and discoveries at every turn. The first part of the book is designed to provide background on the organization of the military in 1914, the order of battle, how to use the records, and a general time-line of events, focusing on 1914 to 1918. The second part concentrates on the combatants, describing each country's armed forces, conscription history, and its military and naval records, and, to the greatest extent possible, their location. (Records that have been microfilmed and are available worldwide through the Family History Library System of the LDS Church are identified by roll number.) The third part of the book describes casualty lists and POW records, and provides a table showing changes in place names, while the final section of the book, an appendix, contains a glossary of abbreviations, Internet addresses, and a select bibliography of books in English. The disposition of personnel files varies from country to country, depending on privacy laws and archival practices. In some cases documents are held by a military archive, in others by a national repository. In a few cases, such as Great Britain, service files are in the process of being transferred from one agency to another. Whatever their disposition--and it is an important aim of this book to identify their disposition--the records covered here fall under the following headings: draft records, personnel papers, unit records, embarkation lists, death records and casualty reports, military parish registers, regimental returns, medal lists, entitlement lists, hospital registers, pension records, and diaries. A particularly useful section of the book, "Research Tips," describes the general organization of military records, the organization of those records in specific countries, and the condition and comprehensiveness of the records. With help from dozens of individuals and institutions throughout the world, in particular from libraries such as the Army Pentagon Library, the Navy Department Library, the Library of Congress, the Family History Library, the Hoover Institute (Stanford University), the Public Record Office (England), and the national archives of at least a dozen countries, the author has managed to compile a guide to WWI service records that is not only unique but totally comprehensive. She has taken a mountain of material and cut it down to size, transforming an unwieldy body of sources into a streamlined archive. Her pioneering efforts will save researchers untold hours of toil, adding limbs to family trees and providing opportunities for further research.

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