



ROYAL MARINES MUSEUM GUIDE SHEET 1:

Records of the Non-Commissioned Ranks of the Royal Marines

The Royal Marines Museum holds the 'biographical' records of certain non-commissioned ranks of the Royal Marines, but these are confined to names that have been brought to our attention for reasons such as awards for gallantry or presentation of items to the Museum. The principal repository for the official service records of the Royal Marines is the National Archive at Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU; and we list a description of these below, in two groups. The first group includes the records that relate directly to the 'biographies' of non-commissioned men, and the second to records that might contain references to them or their dependants. We also give the National Archive reference numbers against our description of these documents.

The description and reference given may not be comprehensive and therefore it is always worth asking the advice of staff of the National Archives for they may be able to suggest other groups or records within their collection, or other avenues of research, that could be worth pursuing.

A note on the records described as "Group A":

On 26th April 1755 'His Majesty's Marine Forces' were raised and became a permanent force. They were organised into fifty companies, of which twenty were based at Portsmouth, eighteen at Plymouth, and twelve at Chatham. They were numbered in sequence, with Company No 1 being based at Portsmouth, No 2 at Plymouth, No 3 at Chatham, No 4 at Portsmouth, No 5 at Plymouth, No 6 at Chatham and so on. This system was decided upon to allow flexibility in the number of companies borne on the strength of the Corps, and the 'home' of the companies. Tables of these companies were published in each edition of the list of Officers of the Marine Forces (National Archive reference: ADM 192), to show where they were stationed, and in the Navy List from 1814. After the peace of 1763, the 'home' of the companies was re-organised, so No 1 went to Chatham, No 2 to Portsmouth and No 3 to Plymouth and so on; but the principle remained the same - that a recruit was allocated a company within a particular Division on his enlistment, and that company was responsible to the Commandant of the Division for maintaining a record of the service of that man.

The number of companies borne on the strength of the Corps, and indeed, the number of Divisions, very much reflected the international situation. During the American War of Independence, for instance, the number of companies rose to 157, but they were reduced to 70 at the Peace of 1783; and in 1805 a new Division, at Woolwich, was established. Another one, the Royal Marine Artillery, had its beginnings in 1804, though it was not established as a separate entity until 1859.



The Divisions maintained the responsibility for keeping the records for their non-commissioned ranks until this century, so the list of records, below, has been divided into Divisions. The earliest type of record of service appears in the Description Books. In 1885, these were superseded by the Registers of Service when the Admiralty ordered “that every person belonging to Royal Marines, except Commissioned Officers, shall be described by a Register Number in conjunction with letters indicating the Division to which he belongs, instead of his Company, and Division as heretofore”. “The letters indicating the Division” were ‘CH’ to represent Chatham, ‘PLY’ to represent Plymouth, ‘PO’ to represent Portsmouth, and ‘RMA’ to represent the Royal Marine Artillery. All four of them had, in fact, started to allocate Register Numbers to their recruits long before - Chatham in 1842, Portsmouth in 1843, Plymouth in 1856 and the Royal Marine Artillery in 1859. So the record of service of a man who enlisted, for example, into Plymouth Division between 1856 and 1885 might be found in either the Description Books or in the Registers of Service.

Before a search of these records can be started, it is necessary to discover the Division to which the subject of the research belonged, if it is not already known. Sometimes this can be found by reading the muster-rolls of HM Ships for a particular year, if it is known he was serving in a certain ship at a certain time; or the rolls of Royal Marines recipients of a certain campaign medal, if it is known he received one. These records are also held at the Public Record Office. It may help the researcher to remember that, prior to 1947, ships’ detachments were drawn from the same RM Divisions as the ‘home’ port of the ship. If he is none of these ‘clues’, the place of the man’s marriage and death might provide a starting point. For instance, a man who married a woman from Devon or Cornwall might be a Plymouth ‘rank’, and a man who died in Hampshire or Sussex might be a Portsmouth one. If the researcher does not have these ‘clues’ either, then he would need to search the Attestation or Discharge records for each of the Divisions for the years when it is thought the subject of his search enlisted into, or was discharged from, the Royal Marines.

Finally, there is a strong emphasis amongst the records listed below, on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is partly because the Royal Marines Museum’s folder of entries from the National Archive’s catalogue is biased in this direction, and partly because we have had long experience in advising members of the public of the records they should search, for ‘biographical’ information on the non-commissioned marines of the past, and know the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are an area where they often ‘get stuck’. Both we, and the staff of the National Archive, would be pleased to advise members of the public where they could trace the record of twentieth century Royal Marines.

It is quite encouraging to a person starting a course of research, to know that, generally speaking, a non-commissioned man remained with the Division into which he had enlisted for the duration of his service; and most of the records described below are filed by year, and then in an alphabetical sequence within that year. The catalogues of the National Archive will show the system of this filing, and reveal that a search for these records is not quite the formidable task it must appear, on first reading this list:



Group A:

Description:	PRO Reference
1. Chatham Division:	
Attestations 1790-1883	ADM 157/1-139
Description Books 1755-1884	ADM 158/1-32
Registers of Service 1842-1905	ADM 159/36-60
General Weekly Returns 1755-1869	ADM 183/42-98
Embarkation Book 1878-84	ADM 183/99
Muster Rolls of HM Ships 1883	ADM 183/100
Discharge Books 1773-1884	ADM 183/101-110
Disposal Books 1814-86	ADM 183/111-113
Registers of Marriages 1865-84	ADM 183/114-115
Registers of Marriages & Births of Children 1830-84	ADM 183/116-117
Registers of Marriages & Births & Deaths of Children 1862-1913	ADM 183/118-119
Historical Notes & Extracts Relating to the Royal Marines at Chatham 1761-1827	ADM 201-50
2. Depot RM, Deal	
Disposal Books 1874-82 (See also Group 7, below)	ADM 193/1-2
3. Plymouth Division	
Attestations 1804-38	ADM 157/140
Attestations and Discharges 1842-83	ADM 157/141-337
Description Books c1763-1884	ADM 158/207-283
Registers of Service 1856-1902	ADM 159/61-79
General Weekly Returns 1761-1919	ADM 184/24-34
Embarkation Books 1803-09 and 1819-32	ADM 184/36-37
Discharge Book 1784-1892	ADM 184/38-41
Disposal Book 1788-97	ADM 184/42
Registers of Marriages & Births & Deaths of Children 1862-1920	ADM 184/43-54
4. Portsmouth Division	
Attestations 1804-36	ADM 157/338-352
Attestations and Discharges 1837-83	ADM 157/353-615
Description Books 1796-1888	ADM 158/91-206
Registers of Service 1843-1901	ADM 159/1-19
General Weekly Returns 1797-1820	ADM 185/38-61
Embarkation Book 1803-14	ADM 185/62
Discharge Books 1816-88	ADM 185/63-67
Disposal Book 1874-77	ADM 185/68
Register of Marriages 1869-81	ADM 185/69
5. Royal Marine Artillery	
Description Books ?-1848	ADM 158/77-85
Description Books ?-1884	ADM 158/86-90



ROYAL MARINES MUSEUM

Registers of Service 1859-1901	ADM 159/20-35
Embarkation Books 1805-37	ADM 193/7
Disposal Book 1845-59	ADM 193/8
Register of Marriages & Baptisms 1810-53 (See also Group 7 below)	ADM 193/9
6. Woolwich Division:	
List of Personnel of the Division 1806-22	ADM 6/407
General Weekly Returns 1868-69	ADM 81/10
Embarkation Books 1805-14	ADM 81/11
Discharge Book 1806/69	ADM 81/12-22
Marriage Roll 1822-53	ADM 81/23
Register of Marriages 1852-69	ADM 81/24
Register of Baptisms 1824-68	ADM 81/25
Description Books 1805-68 (See also Group 7 below)	ADM 158/33-76
7. Miscellaneous Records:	
Lists of Royal Marines who purchased their discharges 1818-24	ADM 6/408
Sheerness RM Church Baptisms 1866-1921	ADM 6/437
Seniority Lists of Warrant Officers 1832-44	ADM 118/212-229
Miscellaneous Attestations 1869-83	ADM 157/616-659
Miscellaneous Discharge Certificates 1761-1843	ADM 193/18
[The attestation and discharge certificates in this group may contain those for the Depot, the Royal Marine Artillery and Woolwich Division]	

Group B:

Description	PRO Reference
1. Pensions & Allowances:	
Miscellaneous papers relating to the proceedings of the Commissioner for managing the charity for the relief of widows 1816-30	ADM 6/389-402
Miscellaneous papers and correspondence on discharges, pensions, pay and compensation 1806-78	ADM 201/20
Good Conduct Medals and Gratuities 1849-84	ADM 201/21
Greenwich Hospital Pensions 1862-1908	ADM 201/22-23
2. Order Books of the Division:	
Chatham:	
Order Books 1767-1941	ADM 183/1-37
Plymouth:	
Order Books 1760-1881	ADM 184/1-14
Commanding Officer's Order Books 1833-36	ADM 184/15-16
Pembroke Dock Divisional Order Books 1845-50	ADM 184/17-18
Garrison Order Book 1873	ADM 184/199
Portsmouth:	
Garrison and Divisional Order Books 1806-1941	ADM 185/1-33



Royal Marine Artillery:	
Order Books 1890-1918	ADM 193/2-6
3. Correspondence to and from the Divisions:	
Chatham:	
Adjutant-General RM's Letter Book - to Chatham 1869-84	ADM 58/1-21
Admiralty Letters - to Chatham 1755-1826	ADM 183/121-125
Letter Books - from Chatham 1823-84	ADM 183/126-129
Depot, RM Deal:	
Adjutant-General RM's Letter Books - to Deal 1868-84	ADM 62/1-18
Plymouth:	
Adjutant-General RM's Letter Books - to Plymouth 1868-84	ADM 61/1-17
Portsmouth:	
Letter Books - from Portsmouth 1772-1853	ADM 185/71-79
Miscellaneous Letters - from Portsmouth - 1816-1922 & 1899-1906	ADM 185/80-81
Letter Books - to the Admiralty 1789-1817	ADM 185/82-104
Letters from the RM Barracks at Portsmouth and Gosport to the RM Office 1833-70	ADM 201-2
Royal Marine Artillery:	
Adjutant-General RM's Letter Books - to the Royal Marine Artillery 1868-84	ADM 59/1-17
RM Office - Correspondence & papers relating to the Royal Marine Artillery 1804-73	ADM 201/31
Woolwich:	
Adjutant-General RM's Letter Books - to Woolwich 1868-69	ADM 57/1-2
Letter Books Etc Covering All Divisions:	
Adjutant-General RM's Divisional Letter Books 1806-67	ADM 56/1-107
Adjutant-General RM's Divisional Letter Books 1871-84	ADM 63/1-12
RM Office - Letter Book containing correspondence with the War Office and the RM Divisions 1868-69	ADM 200/1
RM Office - Brigade Order Book; correspondence with the Commandants of Divisions & 'In-Letters' from the Divisions 1831-38	ADM 201/1
4. Correspondence between the RM Office & the Admiralty:	
Entry Books - Letters to the Admiralty 1826-68	ADM 191/1-37
Entry Books - Minutes to the Admiralty 1862-68	ADM 191/28-32
Entry Books - Letters & Minutes to the Admiralty 1868-69	ADM 191/33-34
Entry Books - Submissions to the Secretary of the Admiralty 1869-75	ADM 191/35-39
Letters from Inspector General RM, mostly to the Admiralty 1860-68	ADM 201/3
Inspector General RM's Reports & Minutes to the Admiralty 1862-68	ADM 201/5
Numbers: all ranks of Royal Marines available for mobilisation 1898	ADM 201/52
Return of numbers entered, discharged, deserted, etc. 1899-1900	ADM 201/53
Returns to the Admiralty 1869-81	ADM 201/70
Returns of numbers of officers, warrant and non-commissioned officers, and men, ashore and afloat 1884-98	ADM 201/71
5. Financial and Educational Matters:	



Savings Bank & Stationery Allowance 1825-68	ADM 201/33
Savings Bank 1843-67	ADM 201/34-36
Schools and Teachers 1840-90	ADM 201/37
Returns showing the financial prospects of a non-commissioned officer from enlistment to discharge 1898	ADM 201/51
6. Royal Marine Units Serving Overseas:	
South Africa Battalion - Order Book 1879	ADM 163/38
Ireland Battalion - Order Book 1880-81	ADM 183/39
Special Battalion of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, formed for service in the Mediterranean: Quartermaster's Diary 1882	ADM 185/70
1st Brigade - Canton, China: Memoranda Book 1858-60	ADM 193/11
1st Battalion, Royal Marine Light Infantry - Canton, China: List of Promotions and Letter Book 1859	ADM 193/12
South Africa Battalion: Muster Roll 1879	ADM 193/13
South Africa Battalion: Letter Book 1879	ADM 193/14
2 nd Battalion Suez: Order Book 1884-85	ADM 193/15
Royal Marine Light Infantry Battalion, Suakim and Sudan: Order Book 1885	ADM 193/16
Papers from Overseas Posts 1809-78	ADM 201/38
Ashanti 1873-74	ADM 201/39
China 1840-1902	ADM 201/40-43
Esquimalt 1883-96	ADM 201/44
Japan 1862-75	ADM 201/45
Suakim 1884-85	ADM 201/46-49
7. Court Martial Register:	
Chatham Division 1902-05	ADM 194/1
Portsmouth Division 1834-1916	ADM 194/2-17
Portsmouth Division - Royal Marines Detachments in HM Ships 1836-39 and 1859-74	ADM 194/18-19
Plymouth Division: North Coast of Spain Battalion 1836-45	ADM 194/20
Plymouth Division 1845-98	ADM 194/21-32
Plymouth Division: District Court Martials 1898-1902	ADM 194/33
Plymouth Division: District & Regimental Court Martials 1902-14	ADM 194/34-38
Royal Marine China Battalion: Chatham, Woolwich & 1st Battalion ranks 1857-60	ADM 194/39
Woolwich & 2 nd Battalion Royal Marine Light Infantry 1857-60	ADM 194/40
Royal Marine Japan Battalion 1864-65	ADM 194/41
Royal Navy Officers and Ratings and Royal Marines 1812-55	ADM 194/42
Royal Navy Officers 1857-1915 (these may include Royal Marine Officers)	ADM 194/43-45
[N.B.: Court Martial Registers are closed for 75 years after the last Court Martial in the piece]	