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## The Canadian War Museum's Online "Military History Research Centre"

Ken Reynolds

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# The Canadian War Museum's Online "Military History Research Centre"

Ken Reynolds

*This note is the next instalment in a series of short pieces on Internet resources and tools available to researchers, writers and readers of Canadian military history. The author, Ken Reynolds, an historian with the Department of National Defence, also writes "The Cannon's Mouth" blog <[www.cannonsmouth.ca](http://www.cannonsmouth.ca)>.*

If you're planning to go to Ottawa to undertake research in Canadian military history, you really should consider visiting the Military History Research Centre (MHRC) at the Canadian War Museum (CWM). The centre incorporates the 413 shelf metres constituting the George Metcalf Archival Collection (archival documents, maps, audio material, etc., as well as some 65,000 images) and the 55,000 volumes of the Hartland Molson Library Collection. Although increasingly visited by military historians – especially those employed by the CWM itself – I think the collection is still under utilized by our community.

Naturally, researchers want to do their homework before they visit an archives. Therefore, this column will take a look at the options available online for someone wanting to know what is available in the CWM collection.

Start at the museum's website <[www.warmuseum.ca](http://www.warmuseum.ca)>, then click on the CWM's portion of the splash page (you can also visit the parent Canadian Museum of Civilization website from here). The category "Explore" is situated in the centre of the subsequent page, and part

way down that page is "Library & Archives." Clicking on that link takes the visitor to the MHRC page. Here, the centre is described in some detail, opening hours are provided and contact information is given. If you have any questions about what you find on the website, contact the staff. My experiences with them have been fantastic.

There is a column on the left side of this page, one part of which is titled "Military History Research Centre." Before heading for the online catalogue, click on the "Finding Aids in the Military History Research Centre" link. At the moment, there are 30 finding aids listed on the page, ten of which are posted online as Adobe Acrobat (PDF) files. The remainder are only available on paper at the MHRC.

Back in the left column, clicking on the "Online Catalogue" link takes the visitor to the catalogue description page and some further options. The "Instructions on searching Gesica" file on this page is a very useful document to read before beginning your first search. GESICA is not the most intuitive search software you will ever see. It is somewhat antiquated by Web 2.0 standards, but

once you get accustomed to using it, it is very useful.

Clicking on "Search GESICA" will lead to the search engine's main page. Here the visitor is again offered several options. Please note, here you have the option of searching the library and archival collection of just the CWM or that of the Canadian Museum of Civilization or both. There is also a third main option, perched atop the list, called "New Acquisitions." The CWM collection is constantly growing and one of the difficulties for any researcher is the question of whether anything relevant has been received by a collection since they last visited some weeks, months or years ago. The new acquisitions lists aid the researcher by providing a list of material received in the past 40 days.

Meanwhile, back at the main search page, clicking on the "Archives (audio-visual, photographic & textual documents)" link under Canadian War Museum (as one possible example), takes the visitor to another page of options. Essentially, this list allows the researcher to expand or refine the search they would like to undertake, incorporating textual material, photographs, moving

The screenshot shows the website's header with the Canadian War Museum logo and navigation tabs: HOME, PLAN YOUR VISIT, WHAT'S ON, EXHIBITIONS, EXPLORE, INTERACT, EDUCATION. The main content area is titled "MILITARY HISTORY RESEARCH CENTRE" and includes sections for "GENERAL INFORMATION" and "CONTACT INFORMATION".

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

The Canadian War Museum's Military History Research Centre houses, in one convenient location, the George Metcalf Archival Collection and the Hartland Molson Library. These extensive national collections of primary and secondary research material document Canada's military history from the pre-contact period to the present.

The George Metcalf Archival Collection contains unique archival documents and photographic materials, and is especially strong on First and Second World Wars. The archival collection, consisting of approximately 413 metres of documentation, includes original letters, diaries, scrapbooks, logbooks, maps, 3-D maps, blueprints, postcards, sheet music, records, oral history tapes and other printed material. The photographic portion of the collection holds approximately 65,000 items including original photographic prints in black and white and colour, negatives, glass slides, daguerotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes, stereoscopic slides, hand-tinted portraits, film reels and videos.

The Hartland Molson Library Collection has approximately 65,000 volumes including regimental histories, published personal memoirs, periodicals and newspapers, wartime pamphlets, military technical and field manuals, multi-media, and 6,000 rare books. The Hamilton Spectator newspaper collection which includes 144,000 Second World War newspaper clippings is available electronically with fulltext searching capabilities at the Democracy at War website.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Military History Research Centre  
Canadian War Museum  
1 Vimy Place  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada K1A 0M8

General inquiries: (819) 776-8652  
vimy.biblio@warmuseum.ca

Image Reproduction Services or Permissions: (819) 776-8686  
imageservices@warmuseum.ca

Archives related inquiries: vimy.archives@warmuseum.ca

Fax: (819) 776-8623

be useful. Using the same keyword, "79th," this search lists four different "79th"-related subject headings, including two descriptions for the 79th Armoured Division, and one each for the 79th Cameron Highlanders and the 79th Field Regiment. (Note, however, that the 79th Depot Battery, CFA, CEF, does not make the "browse" list – I'd recommend running searches in both the keyword and browse search categories).

Other refinements can be introduced to searches, including a few "advanced search" functions, but these simply augment the basics covered above. The search functions for the Canadian War Museum's MHRC collection are extremely helpful, provide researchers with extensive information on the contents of the collection, and even make it possible for the visitor to have material waiting for them upon arrival at the CWM.

images or sound recordings, or simply by choosing the "Complete Collection."

From here, there are two main types of searches based on, in my opinion, whether the researcher is looking for something specific, or whether they are less sure of their target subject's description within the collection.

The "keyword search" function – what the viewer is looking at on the page – is straightforward and allows for some level of refinement within the results. In this example, if the visitor inputs "79th" as the keyword, a total of 46 records are shown, ranging from the British 79th Armoured Division to the 79th Cameron Highlanders of Canada to the 79th Depot Battery, CFA, CEF, and so on. Each record in this view provides a minimal amount of information, including title and call number. Clicking on an individual record leads to a much more descriptive view,

The screenshot shows a search interface with a sidebar on the left containing buttons for FRANÇAIS, START OVER, KEYWORD SEARCH, BROWSE SEARCH, PATRON FUNCTIONS, CONTACT US, HELP, and LOGOFF. The main content area is titled "SEARCH THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES" and includes a "Please Logoff to end your session" message. Below this is a table listing various library and archive collections.

New Acquisitions	
Canadian Museum of Civilization	Library Archives (audio-visual, photographic & textual documents) Library and Archives (CMC)
Canadian War Museum	Library Archives (audio-visual, photographic & textual documents) Library and Archives (CWM)
Canadian Museum of Civilization & Canadian War Museum	Libraries (CMCC) Archives (CMCC) Libraries & Archives (CMCC)
SmartLibrary: Ottawa-Gatineau libraries	
Canadian Libraries	
OCLC WorldCat: Libraries around the world	

For help on any page, click the Help button at the left.  
Note: JavaScript must be enabled in your browser for Patron Functions, ILL/Purchase Requests, or Holds.)

detailing the contents of the record.

If the researcher wishes to be less specific, or is uncertain as to how their subject might be catalogued in the CWM's system, the button in the far left column, "Browse Search," can

Ken Reynolds is an historian with the Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence. His duties as the Assistant Canadian Forces Heritage Officer involve research and writing in a wide variety of areas in Canada's military heritage.