

REGISTER NUMBERS

1. (a) The practice of allocating register numbers to ranks was officially instituted on 1 July 1885. The Admiralty ordered “that every person belonging to the Royal Marines, except Commissioned Officers, shall be described by a Register Number in conjunction with Letters indicating the Divisions to which he belongs, instead of his Company and Division as heretofore”, and that the suffixes “RMA” and “RMLI” should be used whenever sufficient from a legal point of view.
 - (b) The four divisions had begun to allocate register numbers long before, though Chatham began in 1842, Portsmouth in 1843, Plymouth in 1856 and the Royal Marine Artillery in 1859; but there is evidence to suggest that the Description Books were kept concurrently, and it is quite possible that a man entered at, say, Plymouth Division between 1856 and 1885, and was allocated an “old style” number rather than a register number. The official institution of register numbers in 1885 may have been an attempt to “clear up” the administrative muddle which resulted.
 - (c) The “Letters indicating the Division” to which a rank belonged are “CH” indicating Chatham Division Royal Marine Light Infantry, “PLY” indicating Plymouth Division Royal Marine Light Infantry, “PO” indicating Portsmouth Division Royal Marine Light Infantry, and “RMA” indicating Royal Marine Artillery.
2. (a) The Royal Marine Artillery and Royal Marine Light Infantry were amalgamated on 22 June 1923 and the prefix “RMA” was dropped. The prefixes “CH”, “PLY”, and “PO” were retained though to indicate the locations of the three remaining divisions, now styled “Royal Marines”. The suffixes “RMA” and “RMLI” were, of course, dropped at the same time, and “RM”, indicating “Royal Marines” was substituted. The register number allocated to a rank entered at one of the divisions after the amalgamation simply “followed on” the last number allocated before 22 June 1923, e.g. CH12346 George Smith RMLI, CH12347 William Brown RM. All numbers of up to five figures which follow the prefixes “CH”, “PLY” or “PO” indicate ranks entered in the Royal Marine Light Infantry (and subsequently Royal Marines) divisions before October 1925.
 - (b) All numbers of up to five figures which follow the prefix “RMA” indicate ranks entered in the Royal Marine Artillery before the amalgamation. Any Royal Marine Artillery man who then transferred to one of the new divisions retained his old number but substituted his “RMA” prefix with one to indicate his new division. In the case of Portsmouth Division to prevent any duplication of numbers he also added the number “2” to his old number, so RMA17654 Frederick Jones RMA became PO 217654 Frederick Jones RM.

- (c) The suffixes “N” or “S” to any of the “CH”, “PLY”, “PO” or “RMA” numbers indicate a rank who entered one of these divisions for Short Service during World War I, e.g. PLY 13756S John Williams RMLI.
3. The prefix “RMB” followed by the number of up to four figures, indicates a rank entered at the Royal Naval School of Music between its foundation in 1903 and before October 1925.
4. (a) The prefix “D”, followed by a number of up to three figures, indicates a rank entered on the permanent establishment of the Depot, Royal Marines Deal, between 1866 and February 1947. This practice was discontinued then, and the ranks transferred to Chatham, Plymouth or Portsmouth and allocated the next available register numbers.
- (b) The same prefix, followed by a number of up to four figures and the suffixes “N” or “S”, indicates a rank entered in the Royal Marine Divisional Engineers, the Royal Marine Divisional Train, the Royal Marine Medical Unit, the Royal Marine Ordnance Company or the Royal Marine Labour Corps for Short Service during World War I.
5. (a) In October 1925, the letter “X” was added to the prefixes to indicate “men enlisted and re-entered in the Royal Marines under the revised rates of pay i.e. entries and re-entries on and after 5 October 1925, except re-entries before 2 November 1925, after a break in service of less than five years”, and a new sequence of numbers, beginning at 1, was started in each register. By the time this practice was superseded in the Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth registers in 1948, these sequences had reached four figures.
- (b) The Royal Marine Band Service continued to use the “X” until August 1955, through, and then the old sequence of numbers was resumed; but at 3400, above the last number allocated before October 1925, to prevent any duplication.
- (c) The prefixes “CH/X”, “PLY/X”, “PO/X” and “RMB/X” followed by numbers of six figures in the 100000 series, indicate ranks entered for Short Service during World War II.
6. The prefix “EX”, followed by a number of three or four figures, indicates a special Reservist entered at Exton Division between October 1939 and July 1940. The ranks holding these numbers were then transferred to Chatham, Plymouth or Portsmouth and allocated a number in the six figure series (see 5c).
7. (a) The prefix “RM”, followed by a number of four or five figures was adopted in 1948 and superseded the Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth ones. It indicates a rank entered on a Continuous or Short Service engagement between January 1948 and January 1973.

- (b) The same prefix, followed by a number of six figures, indicates a National Service man entered between January 1948 and June 1952.
8.
 - (a) A prefix "RME", followed by a number of three or four figures and the suffix "S" indicates a rank of the Royal Marine Engineers entered for Short Service during World War I. This should not be confused with the Royal Marine Divisional Engineers, who were allocated numbers with a "D" prefix (see 4b).
 - (b) The "RME" prefix, followed by a number of five figures, indicates a rank of the Royal Marine Engineers of World War II.
 9. The prefix "AUX", followed by a number of up to four figures, indicates a rank of the Auxiliary Battalion formed during World War II. Subsequently, these ranks were transferred to Plymouth and allocated numbers in the six-figure sequence (see 5c).
 10. On 1 February 1973, all prefixes in use were replaced and "CH/X" became "POO", "PLY/X" became "SOO", "PO/X" became "ROO" and "RM" became "PO".
 11.
 - (a) In 1952 the Admiralty decided to institute a system to indicate whether or not a Reservist was a National Serviceman.
 - (b) The prefix "RMV" followed by a five figure number, indicates that a man became a Reservist either prior to the establishment of National Service or after his National Service.
 - (c) The prefix "RM(V)9", followed by a five figure number, indicates that a man was a Reservist during whole-time National Service.
 - (d) The prefix "RM V 9", followed a five figure number, indicates that a man was a Reservist during part-time National Service.
 - (e) On 1 July 1955, all but one of these prefixes ("RMV"), were abolished, and all Reservists, whether serving on or discharged before that date, were allocated a new number with the "RMV" prefix. To prevent duplication, this new series had six figures beginning at 200000.
 12. 1973 saw the introduction of computerised service numbers for officers and ratings; prior to this RN and RM officers did not have service numbers. RM Officers' computer numbers started with the letter 'N', and Other Ranks with the letter 'P'.

On 1 November 2006 under Joint Personnel Administration (harmonisation and simplification of all Human Resources administration processes) all service numbers for new joiners started with the digit 3 followed by 7 further digits.

