

# Military Records and Your Family Tree

Military records are an often overlooked or underappreciated source of information. They have the potential to shed light on the life of your ancestor, confirm information about their lives, and provide information to help knock down those research brick walls.

Before you can track down service or pension records you need to try to find the following details:

- Branch & Unit of Service
- Where enlisted
- Dates of Service
- Rank
- Serial/Social Security numbers

\*TIP\* After World War II, soldiers were encouraged to file copies of their discharge papers with their local county clerk's office.

Clues to service can be found in family heirlooms, newspapers, census records, local history books, on gravestones, and more.

IF BORN BETWEEN....	MAY HAVE FOUGHT IN....
1877-1925	World War II (1941-1945)
1872-1900	World War I (1917-1918)
1811-1848	Civil War (1861-1865)
1762-1799	War of 1812 (1812-1815)
1726-1767	Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

# HELD AT THE NATIONAL PERSONNEL RECORDS CENTER

BRANCH OF SERVICE	ENLISTED DISCHARGED AFTER	OFFICERS DISCHARGED AFTER
ARMY	After October 31, 1912	After June 30, 1917
AIR FORCE	After September 1947	After September 1947
NAVY	After 1885	After 1902
MARINE CORPS	After 1904	After 1895
COAST GUARD	After 1914	After 1928



Fire broke out on the sixth floor of the NPRC in 1973.



Aftermath of the 1973 fire.

On July 12, 1973 a fire broke out on the sixth floor of the NPRC, it damaged or destroyed the Official Military Personnel Files for:

- 80% of Army personnel discharged between November 1, 1912 to January 1, 1960,
- 75% of Air Force personnel discharged between September 25, 1947 to January 1, 1964,
- Army Reserves as late as 1964,
- Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine records held on the fifth floor also sustained some damage.
- Files are reconstructed as records are requested.
- The OMPF are found only at the NPRC.

## HELD AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES (NARA)

- In general, *service records* for those who served in the regular army as an enlisted soldier as well as an officer begin in 1789. Navy and Marine Corps records begin in 1798. Volunteer records begin in 1775.
- Additional service records can often be on a state level— meaning at state archives, libraries, and museums— for those who served during this era. Libraries and historical societies may also have compiled lists of veterans from a particular area. Local county clerks may also be of aid.
- Like service records from later wars, these records will not contain details about which battles your ancestor fought in. Refer to unit histories for more information on that aspect.
- Additional details about service can often be found in pension records. Pension records contain a wealth of genealogical information from dates and places of birth, dates and places of marriage, names of children, possibly names of parents or even pages from family bibles.
- *Pension records* from 1775-1916 and *Bounty Land Warrant Applications* from 1775-1855 are also held at NARA. In many cases, applications for bounty land can be found within pension records.
- The United States government did not issue pensions to Confederate soldiers. Many states opted to do so and those pensions are subsequently held on the state level. The states that issued pensions are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.
- Service and pension records from this era are becoming increasingly available on websites such as Ancestry.com, Familysearch.org, and Fold3.com but not all are online.
- Land patents can also reveal information about military service and can be searched online for free on the Bureau of Land Management website.

## HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR WWI & WWII VETERANS

Jennifer Holik's World War II books and more:

[www.jenniferholik.com](http://www.jenniferholik.com)

N.A.R.A. Veterans Services Records (has information about NPRC):

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/>

Sarpy County Veterans Service Office:

<http://www.sarpy.com/veterans/>

## HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR PRE-WORLD WAR I VETERANS

Paid subscription sites\*: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) & [fold3.com](http://fold3.com)

Fee based newspaper websites: [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com) &  
[www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

Free records & wikis: [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

Free newspapers: [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)

Land patents: [www.glorerecords.blm.gov](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov)

Civil War Soldiers & Sailors Index:

<http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>

War of 1812 Preserve the Pensions Project: [preservethepensions.org](http://preservethepensions.org)

Free Revolutionary War Records Guide: <http://www.fold3.com/pdf/M881.pdf>

Sons & Daughters of the American Revolution: [www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org) & [www.sar.org](http://www.sar.org)

Findagrave.com– may find images of headstones on this site, but errors also abound on this site! Verify everything and look for listings with pictures.

*\* Some databases on paid subscription sites are FREE or on occasion available through "free access weekends."*