RESEARCHING MILITARY SERVICE RECORDS

I. Getting Started

Individuals beginning a search of military records would be well served by first reading a general overview of the subject area. Excellent resources in this regard include the “Frequently Asked Questions” publication prepared by the National Archives and Records Administration, http://www.archives.gov/faqs/index.html.

Equally helpful would be the “Frequently Asked Historical Questions” publication of the US Army Heritage and Education Center and a comparable piece compiled by the Naval Historical Center, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ahec/FAQ.htm and http://www.history.navy.mil/nhc3.htm respectively.


II. Obtaining Military Service Records

A. Federal Resources

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), Military Personnel Records, http://www.archives.gov/facilities/mo/st_louis/military_personnel_records.html, is a repository for the personnel, health, and medical records of all discharged and deceased veterans (all branches of the armed forces) who served after 1900. Veterans and their next-of-kin may now use the “eVetRecs” system to request records from the Center, http://www.archives.gov/veterans/evetrecs/index.html. Veterans and next-of-kin without Internet access and all others may submit their requests in writing to:

National Personnel Records Center
Military Personnel Records
9700 Page Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63132-5100
Fax: (314) 801-9195 (requesting military records)

If possible, use a Standard Form 180 for this request. The form may be downloaded from http://www.archives.gov/facilities/mo/st_louis/military_personnel_records/standard_form_180.html. (Note: some times they change the page so you can also download form 180 from http://ww2let.org/downloads/records.htm ) If you cannot obtain a Standard Form 180 for this request, include in your inquiry the service member’s complete name, Social Security number and/or service number, branch of service, and dates of service as well as your return address. Date and place of birth for the veteran would be helpful too, as would be place of discharge, last unit of assignment, and place of entry into service, if known. You must sign and date your request.

1Prepared by Sharon Lawrence, P.O. Box 13541, Austin, TX 78711 (November 11, 2008).
More than one request may be submitted per envelope, but policy requires that you submit a separate form/letter for each individual whose records are being requested. Please allow at least 4 weeks for a reply. If you need assistance, telephone the Center at (314) 801-0800 or contact them via email at “mpr.center@nara.gov” or mpr.status@nara.gov (to check the status of a request).

B. State Resources

State agencies may be valuable resources as well. The Military Records and Research Branch of the Kentucky Department of Military Affairs, for example, contains more than 300,000 discharge documents for Kentucky veterans, beginning with individuals who served in World War I through modern day. It also contains historical records of Kentucky militia and National Guard units dating from 1792. Oregon’s State Archives offers a detailed listing of the resources it has available regarding the military service of state residents. To assist researchers, the state has prepared the Oregon Military Department Records Guide, 1847-1986. For a complete state-by-state listing of state government resources, see the final section of this document.

C. Local Resources

Although the federal government is the primary source for military records, other sources may be close at hand. Local governments, for example, merit a researcher’s attention, as veterans may have filed their military discharge documents (e.g., AGO 100 or DD-214) with the county clerk or recorder. To find contact information for a county, see http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Find_a_County&Template=/cffiles/counties/usamap.cfm.

III. Understanding What You Find

A. Abbreviations/Acronyms

Glance at any service record and one will see quickly that the military has its own special language. Fortunately, the Department of Defense posts a searchable version of its current Dictionary of Military Terms at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict. For those struggling with the abbreviations used in Naval records (e.g., CVHE & LST), the Ship’s Hull Identification guide provided by the US Navy also is a godsend, http://www.nvr.navy.mil/nvrships/s_type.htm, as is its listing of abbreviations for Navy ratings (i.e., jobs), http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq78-2.htm#anchor1614. Grunt, the Ultimate Military Site, also offers an ever growing dictionary of military terms, http://www.milterms.com.

Abbreviations and terms change over time, thus, for the acronyms and terms commonly used during WWII, see:


Basic abbreviations that individuals may encounter frequently, especially in conjunction with World War II research, will include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Antiaircraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Antiaircraft Artillery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAB</td>
<td>Army Air Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAC</td>
<td>Army Air Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAF</td>
<td>Army Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/B</td>
<td>Airborne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Armored Division or Active Duty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AEF American Expeditionary Force
AGF Army Ground Forces
AGS Armed Guard Service
BB Battleship
BN Battalion
Btry Battery
Cav Cavalry
CB Construction Battalion (SeaBee)
CBI China-Burma-India Theater
CIB Combat Infantrymen’s Badge
CMOH Congressional Medal of Honor
CO Commanding Officer
Co Company
CP Command Post
DET Detachment
DNB Died, Non-Battle
DOI Died of Injuries
DOW Died of Wounds
DSC Distinguished Service Cross
ETO European Theater of Operations
FA Field Artillery
GCM Good Conduct Medal
Gp Group
HQ Headquarters
KIA Killed in Action
LOD Line of Duty
LC Landing Craft
LCT Landing Craft, Tank
LDF Local Defense Forces
LSI Landing Ship, Tank
LSV Landing Ship, Vehicle
LVT Landing Vehicle, Tracked
MC Medical Corps
MIA Missing in Action
MOS Military Occupation Specialty
MP Military Police
MT Maintenance
NCO Non-commissioned Officer
(e.g., a sergeant)
NMI No Middle Initial
OLC Oak Leaf Cluster (signifies repeat of award)
Ord Ordnance
PH Purple Heart
Plat Platoon
POW Prisoner of War
PUC Presidential Unit Citation
Qm Quartermaster
REN Reconnaissance
Regt Regiment
Sig Signal
Sqd Squad
TF Task Force
Tk Bn Tank Battalion
TD Tank Destroyer
T/O Table of Organization
Tr Troop
WIA Wounded in Action

B. Awards, Decorations, and Campaign and Service Medals

Most service records will mention commendations earned by the serviceperson individually or as part of a unit. The Institute of Heraldry provides comprehensive information on Army awards, badges, decorations, insignia, and medals, http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Awards/Ribbons/OrderofPrecedence.htm. For assistance in deciphering abbreviations relating to these items, see the Data Codes Quick Reference Guide listed on https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/active/TAGD/awards/index.htm (“Awards and Decorations”).

Similar information about Navy commendations may be found at http://www.history.navy.mil/medals/index.html. (The site also includes an interesting discussion of battle streamers and a detailed listing of awards for all service branches.). To learn more about Air Force and Coast Guard honors, see http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0101/medals.html and http://www.uscg.mil/history/awards/Coast_Guard_Medal_Index.asp.

For instructions on how to request original or replacement medals and awards, go to the NPRC’s site, http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/replacement-medals.html.

C. Military Rank
The individual service branches vary in the names they use to designate the grades/ranks of enlisted personnel and officers. Information for all services is online at http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/insignias/index.html, http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/man/usmillogistics/officer_inter-compare.html, and http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/man/usmillogistics/warrant_enlisted_compare.html. During World War II, grades/ranks were as shown in the following chart.\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private (Pvt)</td>
<td>Private First Class (Pfc)</td>
<td>Private (Pvt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private First Class (Pfc)</td>
<td>Corporal (Cpl)</td>
<td>Corporal (Cpl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician Fifth Class (T/5)</td>
<td>Sergeant (Sgt)</td>
<td>Sergeant (Sgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation (Cor)</td>
<td>Technician Fourth Class (T/4)</td>
<td>Platoon Sergeant (PLSgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant (Sgt)</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant (SSgt)</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant (SSgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician Third Class (T/3)</td>
<td>Technical Sergeant (TSgt)</td>
<td>Gunny Sergeant (GSgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platoon Sergeant (PSP)</td>
<td>First Sergeant (FSgt)</td>
<td>Technical Sergeant (TSgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Sergeant (MSgt)</td>
<td>Major Sergeant (Maj Sgt)</td>
<td>1st Sergeant (FSgt) or Quartermaster Sergeant (QMSgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant (Sgt)</td>
<td>Warrant Officer – Junior Grade (WOJ)</td>
<td>Sergeant Major (Sgt Maj) or Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrant Officer – Junior Grade (WOJ)</td>
<td>Commanded by a lieutenant.</td>
<td>Technical Sergeant (TSgt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO)</td>
<td>Lieutenant – Junior Grade (LTjg)</td>
<td>Warrant Officer (WO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second lieutenant (2Lt)</td>
<td>Lieutenant Commander (LTCom)</td>
<td>Commanded Warrant Officer (CWO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First lieutenant (1Lt)</td>
<td>Commander (CDR)</td>
<td>2nd Lieutenant (2Lt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain (Capt)</td>
<td>Captain (Capt)</td>
<td>1st Lieutenant (1Lt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major (Maj)</td>
<td>Commodore (Cdre)</td>
<td>Captain (Capt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel (LTCol)</td>
<td>Rear Admiral (RADM)</td>
<td>Major (Maj)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonel (Col)</td>
<td>Vice-Admiral (VADM)</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel (LTCol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigadier General (BG)</td>
<td>Admiral (Adm)</td>
<td>Colonel (Col)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major General (MG)</td>
<td>Fleet Admiral (FADM)</td>
<td>Brigadier General (BG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant General (LG)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Major General (MG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General (Gen)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lieutenant General (LG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General of the Army</td>
<td></td>
<td>General of the Army</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Military Units

Organization. For administrative and tactical purposes, military forces are organized in various size units.\(^4\) Army personnel may be grouped in the following manner:

- **Squad** – Small unit of 9 – 14 men, commanded by a sergeant.
- **Platoon** – Three or more squads, commanded by a lieutenant.
- **Company** – Basic combat unit consisting of three or more platoons, commanded by a captain. Total force averages about 120 soldiers.
- **Battery** – Artillery combat unit with three or more heavy guns. Similar in size to a company, commanded by a captain.
- **Battalion** – Three or more companies or batteries, commanded by a lieutenant colonel. Total force averages 500 – 800 men.
- **Regiment** – Large unit formation, consisting of three or more battalions, commanded by a colonel. Total force ranges between 2,000 – 3,000 men.


\(^{3}\)The Marine Corps had no rank equivalent to General or Admiral during World War II.

Brigade – Two regiments with supporting artillery and support troops, commanded by a brigadier general. Used in World War I but not in World War II.

Division – The command units for large formations of three or more regiments, with various supporting troops, commanded by a major general. Total force exceeds 15,000 soldiers.

Corps – Two or three (usually the latter) divisions, commanded by a lieutenant general.

Army – Two or more corps, commanded by a general (four stars). The 36th Infantry Division was assigned to the 5th Army in Italy and the 7th Army in Southern France.


IV. Additional Reference Materials or Resources

A. Records of US Ships and Naval Units from the Modern Era

The National Archives has custody of a wide range of records relating to ships and other Navy units for the period from World War II through Vietnam, with a heavy concentration in WWII vessels. Available records include, but are not limited to:

- Action Reports (WWII)
- Armed Guard Logbooks and Reports (WWII)
- Casualty Reports (WWII – late 1950s)
- Deck Logs (1941 – 1967)

In the alternative, you may write the Institute at 9325 Gunston Road, Room S-112, Fort Belvoir, Virginia 22060-5579 (telephone: 703-806-4971).

Ship plans may be obtained from the Maps and Plans Work Group, Special Media Archives Services Division (NWCS), Room 3320, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001.

For photographs of Naval ships, contact the Still Picture Reference Team, Special Media Archives Services Division (NWCS-Stills), Room 5360, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001 (telephone 301-837-0561; facsimile: 301-837-3621; E-mail: stillpix@nara.gov).

For the cargo ships and troop carriers protected by the Armed Guard Service.

Deck logs consist of brief records of the administrative activities of a ship.
Movement Report Cards (i.e., Records of the Tenth Fleet, WWII)\(^9\)
Muster Rolls/Personnel Diaries (WWII – 1970)
Records of Individual Convoys (i.e., Records of the Tenth Fleet)
Submarine War Patrol Reports (WWII)
War Diaries (WWII)

To learn more about the scope of these materials and to request records for a given ship, write to the following address.

Modern Military Records Unit (NWCTM)
National Archives at College Park
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD  20740-6001
(301) 837-3510

In your letter, include the ship/unit’s name, the date/time period of interest; your full name, address, and telephone number; and as much other detail as possible about the information you would like to obtain. Due to the volume of requests received and the time needed to identify all appropriate records, Archives staff requests that you limit your request to five items per each letter. Allow approximately 10 – 12 weeks from the initial inquiry to receipt of the records.

A charge will be imposed for reproduction/mailing of the records, however, do not send any cash/check/charge card information with your initial inquiry. Staff of the Archives will review your request and send to you by mail an estimate of the cost and payment information. Follow the directions contained in that letter to order the desired records.

B.  **Selected Reference Works**\(^{10}\)


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\(^9\) These file cards list the ports of arrival, due dates, dates of actual arrival, and the dates of setting sail to the next port as well as convoy information, if applicable.

\(^{10}\) The US Air Force Historical Studies Office has made available on-line a growing list of publications covering all facets of Air Force history at http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/Publications/titleindex.htm.


C. Burial Locations & Casualty Lists (Including Missing in Action)

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers an on-line locator service for most of its 120 national cemeteries, http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/j2ee/servlet/NGL_v1. For veterans buried overseas, the American Battle Monuments Commission also facilitates the search for their final resting place, http://www.abmc.gov/wardead/index.php.


For information about service members missing in action or prisoners of war during World War II, see http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/WWII_MIA/MIA_MAIN.HTM.

D. Miscellaneous

The Armed Forces use symbols in a variety of ways. For a basic overview of military map symbols, for example, see http://www.gruntsmilitary.com/sizes.shtml.

Once you’ve navigated the unique world of military acronyms, you also might be interested to learn more about the special language of the military. The US Navy has done a wonderful job of explaining some of the familiar terms, such as scuttlebutt and watches, that one might encounter in old correspondence or military records. See http://www.navy.mil/navydata/navy_legacy_hr.asp?id=280.
V. On-Line Resources

A. Military History Resources

Individuals and organizations interested in military history are among the most active users of the Internet. As a result, a tremendous volume of information is available on-line about any conflict or military unit, especially those of the modern era. Included among the sites that may be valuable reference sources are:

- American Civil War Homepage, http://sunsite.utk.edu/civil-war
- Army Air Forces, http://www.armyairforces.com
- Army Historical Foundation, http://www.armyhistory.org
- Civil War Archive, http://www.civilwararchive.com
- Civil War Center, http://www.cwe.lsu.edu
  (128 volumes of Confederate & Union Army records; 31 volumes of Confederate & Union Navy records)
- Fleet Air Arm Archive (British site), http://www.fleetairarmarchive.net
- HyperWar (annotated history of WWII), http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar
- Index to the Military Rolls of the Republic of Texas (1835-1845), http://www.tshaonline.org/supsites/military/rep_cont.htm
- Naval Historical Center, http://www.history.navy.mil
- Naval Historical Foundation, http://www.navyhistory.org

Offers a glossary and other valuable features.

Naval Vessel Registry, http://www.nvr.navy.mil
Rutgers University, Oral History Archives of World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the Cold War, http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu
US Army Aviation and Missile Command (i.e., Redstone Arsenal Historical Site), http://www.redstone.army.mil/history
US Coast Guard Historian’s Office, http://www.uscg.mil/history
US Military Academy, http://www.dean.usma.edu/departments/history/web03/atlases/index.htm
Veterans History Project, http://www.loc.gov/vets
Vietnam Center and Archive, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu
Western Front Association (WWI), http://www.westernfrontassociation.com
Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), http://www.twu.edu/library/wasp/index.htm
Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us
Women in Military Service for America Memorial, http://www.womensmemorial.org


Superb on-line collection of maps covering military engagements from ancient to modern times.
Women of the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services), http://www.womenofthewaves.com


World War II Documents, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/wwii.asp

B. State Archives and Historical Agencies

AL http://www.archives.state.al.us/reference/military.html
AK http://www.archives.state.ak.us
AZ http://www.lib.az.us/archives
AR http://www.ark-ives.com
CA http://www.ss.ca.gov/archives/level3_genie.htm
CO http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives/military.html
CT http://www.cslib.org/genealogy.htm#P88_10062
DE http://www.state.de.us/sos/dpa/collections/civilwar/cw08.shtml
http://www.hsd.org/gengd.htm
http://www2.lib.udel.edu/subj/genealogy/resguide/mil.htm
FL http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/archives/militarypension/
GA http://www.sos.state.ga.us/archives
HI http://www.hawaii.gov/dags/archives
ID http://www.idahohistory.net
IL http://www.sos.state.il.us/departments/archives/serv_sta.html#military
IN http://www.in.gov/icpr/2316.htm
IA http://www.iowahistory.org/archives/research_collections/state_gov_records/state_government_records.html#Military
KS http://www.kshs.org/genealogists/military
KY http://www.kdla.ky.gov/collections/military/request.htm
http://www.mainehistory.org/library_holdings.shtml#military
MD http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/refserv/genealogy/html/militre.html
http://www.mdhs.org
MA http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arccol/colidx.htm#military
http://www.masshist.org/library/begin.cfm#military
MI http://www.michigan.gov/hal/0,1607,17-160-15479-126893--00.html
MN http://shop.mnhs.org/moreinfo.cfm?Product_ID=420&bhcp=1
MS http://www.mdah.state.ms.us
MO http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/military.asp
MT http://mhs.mt.gov/default.asp

17Site has the capability to translate the material into French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.