Military Service Records, Awards, and Unit Histories: A Guide to Locating Sources

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Summary

This guide provides information on locating military unit histories and individual service records of discharged, retired, and deceased military personnel. It also provides information on locating and replacing military awards and medals. Included is contact information for military history centers, websites for additional sources of research, and a bibliography of other publications, including related CRS reports.

This report will be updated as needed.
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Personnel Files: Military Service and Pension Records at the National Archives

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), Military Personnel Records, holds most existing military personnel, health, and medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services from World War I to the present. Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) records may be requested online at https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records, by mail (the appropriate address listed on the back of the form), or fax (314-801-9195) using the Standard Form 180.

Veterans and their next-of-kin (NOK) may request these records. According to the NPRC, for the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, the NOK is defined as the unremarried widow or widower, son, daughter, father, mother, brother or sister; and for the Army, the NOK is defined as: the surviving spouse, eldest child, father or mother, eldest sibling or eldest grandchild.

If you do not meet the definition of NOK, you are considered a member of the general public and may request military records via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). See Access to OMPFs by the General Public at https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/general-public.html.

In 1973, a disastrous fire at NPRC destroyed approximately 16 million to 18 million Army and Air Force official military personnel files. In such cases where files were lost, NPRC uses alternate sources of information to respond to requests.

More information about obtaining military personnel files can be found on the NPRC website, http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/, or by contacting the center at

National Personnel Records Center
Military Personnel Records
1 Archives Drive
St. Louis, MO 63138
Tel: (314) 801-0816 congressional line
Tel: (314) 801-0800 public line
Status Update Request Form: https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/forms

Older military personnel records (generally prior to 1917) are located at

National Archives and Records Administration
Textual Archives Division
Washington, DC 20408
http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records.html

Military Awards and Decorations

The NPRC also provides information on how to request military awards and decorations online and by mail for veterans and their NOK; replacing certain military medals; and obtaining a Cold War Recognition Certificate. The general public may also purchase a copy of the veteran’s OMPF to determine the awards due and obtain the medals from a commercial source.

By military service (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force including Army Air Corps & Army Air Forces) via mail:

National Personnel Records Center
1 Archives Drive
St. Louis, MO 63138

For Coast Guard:
Coast Guard Personnel Service Center
4200 Wilson Blvd, Suite 900 (PSC-PSD-MA)
Stop 7200
Arlington, VA 20598-7200


The NPRC will provide copies of DD-214s (or equivalent) or SF-50s to authorized requesters upon request. These documents may be used to apply for the Certificate. This is in accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998 (P.L. 105-85, Section 1084). This Certificate is awarded to all members of the armed forces and qualified federal government civilian personnel who served the United States during the Cold War era from September 2, 1945, to December 26, 1991.

**Finding Unit Histories**

The Modern Military Records office of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has custody of records relating to World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The records vary by conflict and branch of service. The records for Army units active during the interwar periods (1920-1939 and 1945-1950) are incomplete. For more information, contact the Textual Records office at

Textual Records Office
National Archives and Records Administration at College Park
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001
Tel: (301) 837-3510
Email: archives2reference@nara.gov

If a military unit record is not publicly available, a FOIA request may be submitted to the agency where the record is held. For example, for special access records held at the National Archives at College Park, contact the Archives FOIA office at

Special Access and FOIA Division
The National Archives at College Park
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001
Tel: (301) 387-3190
Email: specialaccess_foia@nara.gov

For more information on how to submit a FOIA request, visit https://www.foia.gov/how-to.html.

Auxiliary and organizational records, including morning reports, unit rosters, officer pay cards (Army), muster rolls (Navy), U.S. Army Surgeon General’s office records and Veterans
Administration index cards are maintained at the National Archives at St. Louis, Missouri. Further information is available at http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/archival-programs/other-records/index.html.

Certain published unit histories can be found in the collections of the Library of Congress or the military history center of each U.S. military branch (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Military History Centers and Museums**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center or Museum</th>
<th>Telephone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Air Force</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Air Force Historical Research Agency</td>
<td>(334) 953-5697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 Chennault Circle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6424</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:AFHRA.NEWS@us.af.mil">AFHRA.NEWS@us.af.mil</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.afhra.af.mil">http://www.afhra.af.mil</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Air Force Historical Support Division</td>
<td>(202) 404-2264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HQ USAF/HOH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Brookley Avenue, Box 94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Base Anacostia Bolling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC 20032-5000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: usaf.pentagon.af-ho.mbx.afhso-research@mil</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(preferred method)</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.afhistory.af.mil">http://www.afhistory.af.mil</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Museum of the U.S. Air Force</td>
<td>(937) 255-3286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1100 Spaatz Street</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wright-Patterson AFB, OH 45433</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:nationalmuseum.mup@us.af.mil">nationalmuseum.mup@us.af.mil</a></td>
<td></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil">http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Army</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Army Center of Military History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collins Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>102 4th Avenue Bldg. 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fort McNair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington, DC 20319-5060</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:usarmy.mcnair.cmh.mbx.answers@mail.mil">usarmy.mcnair.cmh.mbx.answers@mail.mil</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.history.army.mil">http://www.history.army.mil</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Congressional Inquiries Division*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(202) 685-2676 for House offices</td>
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<tr>
<td>(202) 224-2811 for Senate offices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>*For those inquiring from the office of a Member of Congress. All others should use email.</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Army Heritage &amp; Education Center (USAHEC)</td>
<td>(717) 245-3949 research assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>950 Soldiers Drive</td>
<td>(717) 245-3972 information desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlisle, PA 17013-5021</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:usarmy.carlisle.awc.mbx.ahec-ves@mail.mil">usarmy.carlisle.awc.mbx.ahec-ves@mail.mil</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu">https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coast Guard</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Coast Guard Historian’s Office</td>
<td>(202) 372-4653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commandant (CG-09231)</td>
<td>(757) 398-6643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTN: Coast Guard Historian’s Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Coast Guard Stop 7031</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2703 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC 20593-7031</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:history@uscg.mil">history@uscg.mil</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.uscg.mil/history/">http://www.uscg.mil/history/</a></td>
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</table>
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Center or Museum                                      Telephone Number

Coast Guard Museum                                   (860) 444-8511
U.S. Coast Guard Academy                             
15 Mohegan Avenue                                    
New London, CT 06320-4195                            
http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg092/museum/

Marine Corps                                         
Marine Corps History Division                        (703) 432-4874 research inquiries
2044 Broadway Street                                 (703) 432-4877 general inquiries
Quantico, VA 22134                                   
http://www.history.usmc.mil

Marine Corps Heritage Foundation                    (800) 397-7585
18900 Jefferson Davis Highway                       (703) 640-7965
Triangle, VA 22172                                   
Email: info@marineheritage.org
http://www.marineheritage.org/

Merchant Marine                                      
American Merchant Marine Museum                      (516) 726-6047
300 Steamboat Road                                   
Kings Point, NY 11024                               
Email: museum@usmma.edu
http://www.usmma.edu/museum

Navy                                                
Naval History & Heritage Command                     (202) 433-3224 archives
805 Kidder Breese Street, SE                         (202) 433-4132 library
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060                  (202) 433-7880 public inquiries
Email: archives@navy.mil (archives branch)          
Email: nhhpublicaffairs@navy.mil (public inquiries)
http://www.history.navy.mil

Source: Table compiled by the Congressional Research Service.

Additional Sources for Research

CRS Reports

CRS Report R41386, Veterans’ Benefits: Burial Benefits and National Cemeteries, by Scott D. Szymendera

CRS Report R42324, Who Is a “Veteran”?—Basic Eligibility for Veterans’ Benefits, by Scott D. Szymendera

CRS Report 95-519, Medal of Honor: History and Issues, by Barbara Salazar Torreon

CRS Report R42704, The Purple Heart: Background and Issues for Congress, by Barbara Salazar Torreon
Web Resources

Official military:
Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress
The project collects, preserves, and makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans.
http://www.loc.gov/vets/

Veterans Affairs Nationwide Gravesite Locator
The database contains burial locations of veterans and their family members.
http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/

American Battle Monuments Commission
The website contains databases of veterans interred or memorialized at overseas American military cemeteries and memorials.
http://www.abmc.gov

Philippine Army and Guerilla Records at the National Archives
The collection includes records of the Philippine Commonwealth Army of the United States Armed Forces Far East (USAFFE), including recognized Philippine Guerrilla forces (not the Army of the United States or Philippine Scouts) during World War II.

The Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, National Park Service
This website contains a database of the men who served in the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War, as well as information on regiment histories, significant battles, and some prisoner-of-war records and cemetery records.

Selected Bibliography


**Author Contact Information**

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