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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 unmarried 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.

Request information on Military Awards online at <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/awards-and-decorations.html>.

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

Cold War Recognition Certificate is at <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/awards-and-decorations.html#cwc>.

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

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

Center or Museum	Telephone Number
Coast Guard Museum U.S. Coast Guard Academy 15 Mohegan Avenue New London, CT 06320-4195 http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg092/museum/	(860) 444-8511
Marine Corps	
Marine Corps History Division 2044 Broadway Street Quantico, VA 22134 http://www.history.usmc.mil	(703) 432-4874 research inquiries (703) 432-4877 general inquiries
Marine Corps Heritage Foundation 18900 Jefferson Davis Highway Triangle, VA 22172 Email: info@marineheritage.org http://www.marineheritage.org/	(800) 397-7585 (703) 640-7965
Merchant Marine	
American Merchant Marine Museum 300 Steamboat Road Kings Point, NY 11024 Email: museum@usmma.edu http://www.usmma.edu/museum	(516) 726-6047
Navy	
Naval History & Heritage Command 805 Kidder Breeze Street, SE Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060 Email: archives@navy.mil (archives branch) Email: nhhcpublicaffairs@navy.mil (public inquiries) http://www.history.navy.mil	(202) 433-3224 archives (202) 433-4132 library (202) 433-7880 public inquiries

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.

<http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/philippine-army-records.html>

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.

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

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U.S. Naval War Records Office. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. Harrisburg, PA: National Historical Society, 1987. 30 v.

U.S. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Washington: GPO, 1880-1901. 70 v.

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