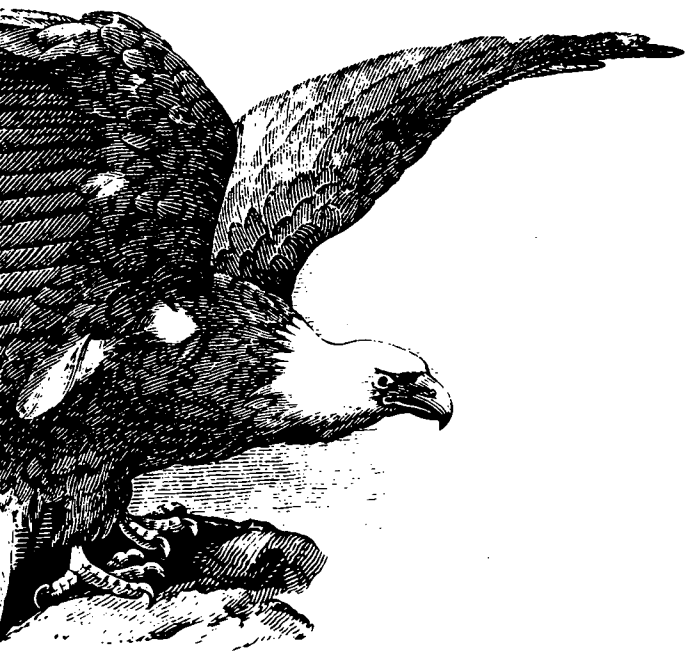


Military Service Records

**in the
National Archives
of the United States**

**National Archives and
Records Administration
Washington, DC 20408**



The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the official depository for records of military personnel separated from the U.S. Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy. The records are housed in three locations: the National Archives Building, Washington, D.C., the Washington National Records Center (WNRC), Suitland, Md. and the National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo. Listed below are some of the military service records that are in the holdings maintained at each of these locations. On subsequent pages are pertinent details about the records available.

National Archives Building

Records relating to:

Volunteers

Chiefly military service performed by persons serving during an emergency and whose service was considered to be in the Federal interest, during the period 1775 through 1902.

U.S. Regular Army

Regular Army enlisted personnel who served from 1789 through October 31, 1912, and officers who served from 1789 through June 30, 1917.

U.S. Navy

Enlisted personnel who served from 1798 through December 31, 1885, and officers who served from 1798 through December 31, 1902.

U.S. Marine Corps

Enlisted personnel who served from 1789 through 1904 and some officers who served from 1789 through December 31, 1895.

U.S. Coast Guard

Persons who served in predecessor agencies to the U.S. Coast Guard; i.e., the Revenue Cutter Service (Revenue Marine), the Life-Saving Service, and the Lighthouse Service, 1791-1919 (See also the following listing of records in the National Personnel Records Center.)

Confederate States

Records relating to persons who rendered military service for the Confederate States government in its armed forces from 1861 through 1865.

Veterans Records

Claims files for pensions based on Federal military service, 1775-1916, and bounty land warrant application files relating to claims based on wartime service, 1775-1855.

National Personnel Records Center

Records relating to:

U.S. Army

Officers separated after June 30, 1917, and enlisted personnel separated after October 31, 1912.

U.S. Air Force

Officers and enlisted personnel separated after September 1947 (date of establishment of Department of the Air Force).

U.S. Navy and Marine Corps

Naval officers separated after 1902, naval enlisted personnel separated after 1885, and Marine Corps officers separated after 1895, and enlisted personnel separated after 1904.

U.S. Coast Guard

Officers separated after 1928 and enlisted personnel separated after 1914; civilian employees of predecessor agencies (Revenue Cutter Service, Life-Saving Service, and Lighthouse Service) of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1864-1919.

Washington National Records Center

Records relating to:

U.S. Coast Guard

Officers who served from 1890 to 1929, includes records of former Revenue Cutter Ser-

vice officers whose terms of service extended beyond 1915.

Records Relating to Volunteer Soldiers

Records of volunteer soldiers who fought in various wars chiefly in the Federal Government's interest from the Revolutionary War through the Philippine Insurrection, 1775-1902, so-called compiled military service records, are in the National Archives Building.

A compiled military service record consists of a card or cards on which is recorded information about a soldier that was collected from muster rolls, returns, hospital registers, prison records, and other records. Cards for each war are arranged by State, thereunder by military unit, and thereunder alphabetically by surname. The War Department program for preparation of the compiled service records was begun some years after the Civil War to permit more rapid and efficient checking of military and medical records in connection with claims for pensions and other veterans benefits.

Compiled military service records for the Revolutionary War period are fragmentary because many of the original records were lost in a fire that occurred November 8, 1800, in offices the Secretary of War occupied. Other records were lost or destroyed in 1814 when Government buildings in Washington were ransacked and burned by the British Army.

The compiled military service record of each volunteer soldier is filed with similar records for other soldiers who fought in the same war and regiment or other unit. In addition to abstracts of information about the soldier from original rolls, returns, registers, or other records, the record sometimes contains, particularly for later wars, one or more original documents relating to the soldier. The records usually show a soldier's presence or absence on certain dates. Typically, they also show the soldier's rank, military organization, and term of service; sometimes they also show age, place of enlistment, and place of birth. Although they are of value for proving military service, they usually contain little genealogical information.

Many of the original records from which compiled service records were made are among NARA holdings, but there is rarely need to examine them because of the care and thoroughness with which the information they contain was copied. The information shown on a card in an individual's compiled service record is almost always taken verbatim from

the original records; the records themselves rarely contain additional information on the individual.

It should be noted that, although the War Department made every effort to assemble available official information, many compiled service records are not complete. Full records of the participation of a given unit may not have been available. Also, a soldier may have served in a State militia unit that was never called into the service of the Continental, Federal, or Confederate States governments. Records of such service, if available, are most likely to be in State archives or in the custody of the State adjutant general.

Records Relating to Regular Army Service

Records relating to service in the U.S. Regular Army by officers, 1789-1917, and enlisted men, 1789-1912, during peace and war are in the National Archives Building. Records relating to officers serving in the Regular Army are scattered among many files and vary in content so much that it is not practical to describe them in detail here. An officer's service is likely to be documented in orders, muster rolls, returns of posts and military units, station books, War Department correspondence relating to personnel, and medical and other records.

The War Department did not maintain or compile personnel files for Regular Army officers until 1863. Records relating to officers who served prior to that date are scattered among many different series of War Department records that can be located only after examining numerous indexes and registers. The National Archives cannot undertake the research necessary to locate all such documents. We can furnish copies of pension files for Regular Army officers serving before 1863 which normally include summaries of their service. The Regular Army officers' files created after 1863 vary greatly in size; such a file can consist of two or three pages or several hundred pages.

Records relating to service of Regular Army enlisted men include registers of enlistments, muster rolls of regular units, and medical and other records. Registers of enlistments show for each man his name, age, place of birth, date and place of enlistment, occupation at enlistment, regiment and company, physical description, and date and reasons for discharge, or, where applicable, date of death or date of desertion and sometimes of apprehension or return after desertion. The information in these diverse and scattered sources was never collected and organized into compiled service records as was done for volunteer soldiers. When a military

record of an enlisted man is requested by mail, we will furnish copies of the relevant page(s) from the enlistment registers.

Personnel records of officers separated from service after June 30, 1917, and of enlisted personnel separated after October 31, 1912, are in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Mo. Approximately 80 percent of the records of Regular Army officers and enlisted men separated after June 30, 1917, and before December 31, 1959, were destroyed in a fire at the National Personnel Records Center on July 12, 1973. However, the Center's holdings include other records of units and commands from which information can be abstracted concerning individual service. For the most part, the personnel files which were not destroyed in the 1973 fire are individual files in which significant papers pertaining to service were maintained in a single jacket or folder generally known as the service record, or 201 file. Officers' personnel records include those for separated Regular Army officers and active duty service of National Guard officers; for Reserve officers, if deceased; for nurses, contract surgeons, field clerks, and Public Health Service officers who were commissioned in the U.S. Army; and for officers of the Philippine Scouts. Enlisted men's records include those of members of the Specialist Corps, Russian Railway Corps, Student Army Training Corps, Philippine Scouts, former members of the National Guard, and reservists, if deceased. The clear-cut distinction between regular and nonregular service that characterizes records of the pre-1917 period does not persist thereafter.

Records Relating to Naval and Marine Corps Service

In the National Archives Building are records relating to service in the American Navy and Marine Corps in the Revolutionary War, 1775-83; in the U.S. Navy--officers, 1798-1902, and enlisted men, 1798-1885; and in the U.S. Marine Corps--officers, 1798-1895, and enlisted men, 1798-1904. Naval and marine service records of the Revolutionary War period are fragmentary, including only such information as the serviceman's name and rank, the name of the vessel on which he served, and the dates of his service or the dates on which he was paid. See also Records Relating to Volunteer Soldiers, p.3. The War Department formed a series of naval compiled service records for the Revolutionary War by transcribing onto cards information from its collection of Revolutionary War naval records.

These compiled service records contain abstracts of information relating to naval personnel as found in original muster rolls, payrolls, receipts for pay, assignments of pay, and other related records.

No compilations of service performed by American naval officers following the Revolutionary War were created by the Navy Department. Abstracts of service performed by most commissioned Regular Navy and Marine Corps officers, volunteer naval officers of the Civil War, some noncommissioned officers, and a few professors and teachers at the U.S. Naval Academy were compiled by the Navy Department. These abstracts covering the period 1798-1924 usually provide the date of the officer's appointment, the date and nature of changes in rank, and, where pertinent, the date and nature of the termination of his service. Likewise, prior to 1885 no compilations of service performed by enlisted men were assembled by the Navy Department. Records pertaining to such service are scattered among many files, registers, returns, reports, and other related records. Enlistment returns and ships' muster rolls usually show the date and place of enlistment, age at enlistment, civilian occupation, and the State and/or country of birth. Pension and bounty land warrant application files for both officers and enlisted men usually contain summaries of their entire naval service as well as provide information concerning their families.

In the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Mo., are individual personnel records (jackets) of Navy commissioned officers separated after 1902, Navy enlisted personnel separated after 1885, Marine Corps officers separated after 1895, and Marine Corps enlisted personnel separated after 1904.

Records Relating to Air Force Service

In the National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo., are military personnel files and related records for officer and enlisted personnel of the Air Force, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard separated since September 1947, the date the U.S. Air Force was established. Service in predecessor organizations (Army Air Forces, Army Air Corps, and Army Air Service) is also documented in the personnel files. Some of these records were destroyed in a fire at the National Personnel Records Center on July 12, 1973. Most affected were records for 1947 to 1963 for Air Force servicemen whose surnames begin with "I" through "Z". However, the Center's holdings include other records

from which information can be abstracted concerning individual service.

Records Relating to Coast Guard Service

The U.S. Coast Guard was created by an act of January 28, 1915, which consolidated the former Revenue Cutter and Life-Saving Services of the Department of the Treasury. The Bureau of Lighthouses of the Department of Commerce became part of the Coast Guard on July 1, 1939.

In the National Archives Building are record books, indexed by name of Revenue Cutter Service officers, 1791-1919, that sometimes show date and place of birth and death, but always show date of appointment, promotions, special duty assignments, and names of vessels served on. There are also applications for appointments and commissions as officers or cadets, ca. 1833-90, copies of officers' commissions, 1791-1909, and muster rolls and payrolls (muster rolls after 1871) of revenue cutters, 1832-1914. The muster rolls show each crewmember's name, rating, number of days served during the reported month, transfers, and often termination of service. For enlisted men muster rolls usually also show date and place of enlistment, place of birth, age, and physical description.

Records relating to the service of Coast Guard officers, 1890-1929, in the WNRC, include records of former Revenue Cutter Service officers whose terms of service extended beyond 1915. Questions about these records, housed in the Washington National Records Center, should be directed to the Suitland Reference Branch, NARA, Washington, DC 20409.

Inspectors and engineers of the Lighthouse Service districts were officers of the Army and Navy detailed from their respective services; their records will be found under the branch they served in. All other employees of the Lighthouse Service and inspectors, superintendents, keepers, and other employees of the Life-Saving Service were civilians.

Records relating to the service of civilians formerly employed by the Revenue Cutter Service, Life-Saving Service, and Lighthouse Service, some dating back to 1864 but mostly dating from 1900, are on file at the National Personnel Records Center. Information cannot be furnished on the basis of a name alone. Other identifying data, such as date, place, and type of service, should be provided. Also in the National Personnel Records Center are personnel records of Coast Guard officers sepa-

rated since 1928 and enlisted personnel separated after 1914.

Records Relating to Confederate Service

Compiled service records for many but not all of the men who served in the Confederate States Army are in the National Archives Building. They contain virtually no genealogical information, but they are of value for proving military service. Compiled Confederate military service records are similar to those previously described relating to volunteer soldiers.

As the Confederate government evacuated Richmond in April 1865, the central military records of the Confederate Army were taken to Charlotte, N.C., by the adjutant and inspector general, who then transferred them to the Union commander. The records were taken to Washington, where, along with other Confederate records captured by the Union Army, they were preserved by the War Department. In 1903 the Secretary of War persuaded the Governors of most Southern States to lend the War Department Confederate military personnel records in the possession of the States so that they could be copied.

The compiled military service record of a Confederate soldier consists of one or more card abstracts and sometimes one or more original documents. Each card abstract copies an entry in original records, such as Confederate muster rolls, returns, and descriptive rolls and Union prison and parole records. The card abstracts in the jacket of any soldier, if the original record of his service was complete, may serve to trace that service from beginning to end, but they normally do little more than tell where he was at a given time. The only information of genealogical interest they are likely to give is his age and place of enlistment.

Many of the original records from which compiled service records were made are among NARA holdings, but there is rarely need to examine them because of the care and thoroughness with which the information they contain was copied.

A soldier may have served in a State militia unit that was never mustered into Confederate service. Records of service in such units, if they exist, are likely to be in the archives of the State or in custody of the State adjutant general. Many Southern States have records relating to payment of State benefits to Confederate veterans.

In the National Archives Building there are records for some persons who served in the Con-

federate Navy and Marine Corps, 1861-65. Confederate naval and marine service records give the serviceman's name and rank and sometimes his station. If he was imprisoned, a record may give the date of his capture, place of his imprisonment, and date of his parole.

Records Relating to Veterans Who Applied for Pensions or Bounty Land Warrants

From the earliest days of English settlement in America, the Colonies gave financial aid to persons disabled in military service and to dependents of persons killed in service. After the Colonies declared their independence, the Continental Congress passed resolutions promising compensation to all who were disabled in the Revolutionary War, to those who continued in service to the end of the war, and to widows or orphans of officers killed in the war. Compensation could be in money or land, or both. Because the Continental Congress lacked funds, it relied on the States to provide compensation; some States also provided benefits independently of the Congress.

Pension Files

The First Congress under the Constitution approved an act making the United States responsible for payment of disability pensions that had been granted by States for service in the Revolutionary War. Acts passed during the next three decades limited benefits to those disabled in service and to dependents of those killed in service or who died as a result of service. In 1818, however, Congress provided that every person who had served in the Revolutionary War for 9 months or until the end of the war and who was "in need of assistance from his country for support" should be pensioned. Later legislation removed the requirement of need.

Following the precedent set for Revolutionary War veterans, Congress has authorized pensions for those who served in succeeding wars, including the Indian wars, and in peacetime. Pensions for peacetime service have been limited to veterans who suffered service-connected disabilities or to dependents of men who died as a result of service. The records of pensions granted or applied for under many of these laws are in the National Archives Building. The pension files relate to claims based on service in the Army, Navy, or Marine Corps between 1775 and 1916.

Applications that the Secretary of War received through November 8, 1800, together with supporting papers, apparently were destroyed in the War Department fire of that date and in the fire of 1814. A few records relating to early claims still exist, however, and information from them has been summarized on cards that are filed with Revolutionary War pension and bounty land warrant application files.

A typical pension file contains the application of the claimant, documents submitted as evidence of identity and service, and records of action taken on the claim. The claimant may have been a veteran or his widow, minor children, or other dependent. Since a claimant could have applied for a pension under several different acts, a pension file may contain more than one application from a claimant. It may also contain applications from several claimants because applications for pensions based on the service of one serviceman for a certain period were usually filed together. Documents submitted in support of some pension claims include affidavits attesting to service, pages from family bibles, and copies of records of birth, marriage, and death. For service in the Civil War and later, a pension file may also include Bureau of Pensions questionnaires sent out in 1898 and 1915, which contain genealogical information.

Pensions based on military service to the Confederate States of America were authorized by some Southern States but not by the Federal Government until 1959. Inquiries about State pensions should be addressed to the State archives at the capital of the veteran's State of residence after the war.

Bounty Land Warrant Application Files

In 1776 and later, the Continental Congress provided for granting public land to those who remained in the armed forces until the end of the war or until discharged by the Congress and to dependents of those killed. Laws passed between 1796 and 1855 also authorized granting warrants for land to those who had served in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, Indian wars, and the war with Mexico. Bounty land warrant application files relate to claims based on wartime service between 1775 and March 3, 1855.

The documents in a bounty land warrant application file are similar to those in a pension file. They include the application of the claimant, who may have been a veteran or a veteran's widow or heirs, affidavits attesting to service, and the jacket on which action taken on the claim is noted. Since

Congress enacted many laws relating to bounty land, more than one application may be found in a file. Many of the application files relating to Revolutionary War and War of 1812 service have been combined with pension files.

Information in the Records

Both pension and bounty land warrant application files usually show name, rank, and military unit of the veteran and period of his service. If a veteran applied, the file usually shows his age or date of birth and place of residence at the time he applied, and sometimes his place of death. If his widow applied, the file shows her age and place of residence, her maiden name, the date and place of their marriage, and the date and place of his birth. When application was made on behalf of minor children or by heirs of the veteran, their names and sometimes their ages or dates of birth are shown.

Information on Discharges, Burials, Headstones

Discharges

Before 1944, Army regulations allowed the preparation of only an original discharge certificate, which was given to the soldier. The National Archives would not have the certificate on file (unless it was later submitted by the veteran in support of a pension or bounty land claim) nor does it have the authority to prepare another.

Burials

Records in the National Archives relating to burials of veterans in national cemeteries are incomplete. Requests for such information should be addressed to the Director, Cemetery Service (41A), National Cemetery System, Veterans Administration, Washington, DC 20420.

Headstones

The Monument Service (42), Veterans Administration, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for issuing standard Government headstones or markers for the graves or crypts of deceased veterans. Applicants are required to furnish certain information concerning the deceased veteran, but copies of service records need not be submitted with applications because the Veterans Administration performs verification of service.

Restrictions on Records in the National Archives Building and in the Washington National Records Center

Records in the National Archives Building relating to military service are available for public examination and reproduction subject to restrictions imposed by the Archivist of the United States in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 552 and 44 U.S.C. 2104 on release of records containing information regarding national security, information exempted from disclosure by statute, and information which would invade the privacy of an individual.

Restrictions on Records in the National Personnel Records Center

The National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Mo., will honor requests for information from military personnel files in its custody received from official sources and from veterans and members of their immediate families. Requests from family members are restricted to a limited number of relatives, such as the father, grandfather(s), brother(s), and uncle(s).

If the person whose records are requested is living, his written consent is required before any information may be supplied. The information furnished is usually limited to complete name and dates of service, but, if needed to assure identification of the person or if specifically requested, such information as date and place of birth, and name of father, mother, and wife is furnished.

Genealogical requests for information concerning military service should be submitted on GSA Form R6-7231 (available from the Center) to National Personnel Records Center (MPRC), 9700 Page Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63132. All other inquiries about military personnel should be submitted on Standard Form 180, Request Pertaining to Military Personnel Records (available from the Center), to National Personnel Records Center (MPRC), 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132.

Records relating to Federal employment of civilians are subject to U.S. Office of Personnel Management regulations governing release of information from personnel records consistent with the provisions of the Public Information Act of 1966

(5 U.S.C. 552). Information furnished is limited to name, position titles, grades, salaries, and duty stations. An inquiry about the employment record of a civilian should contain as much identification as possible and should be addressed to National Personnel Records Center (CPR), 111 Winnebago St., St. Louis, MO 63118.

How to Order Copies of Unrestricted Records

Photocopies of unrestricted original documents are available for a fee. NARA will conduct a search for the documents if, in addition to the full name of the serviceman, the war in which he served, and the State from which he entered service, an inquirer can supply other identifying information. (If the request concerns a Navy enlisted man, the name of at least one vessel on which he served, with approximate dates, must be given and, if possible, his place of enlistment).

Requests for copies of veterans records housed in the National Archives Building should be submitted on National Archives Trust Fund (NATF) Form 80, Order for Copies of Veterans Records, which will be furnished free on request. The form should be filled out according to the instructions and with as much information as possible and submitted to the General Reference Branch (NNRG), National Archives and Records Administration, 8th and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20408.

If a file is found for the veteran in question, NARA will supply copies of documents that provide pertinent information about the veteran and his family. Instructions accompanying the NATF Form 80 also explain the procedure for payment for copies.

If a name supplied by an inquirer is not that under which the serviceman was carried on the rolls or if the unit in which he served is not known or is given incorrectly, the NARA staff may find it difficult to identify his record. There are usually many servicemen of the same or nearly the same name, and the name under which a serviceman was listed may differ from the name by which he was known to members of his family.

NARA can only make identifications that are relatively easy to establish. It cannot undertake extensive research or lengthy evaluation of conflicting or uncertain evidence in the records. If

such research or evaluation is necessary, it will offer to furnish reproductions of all the records.

In attempting to identify a serviceman when the information supplied is not sufficient, the NARA staff will try to match initials and spelling of the surname given in a standard list of variant spellings. If the staff is able to reduce the possibilities to a few individual records, it will attempt identification by comparing the records with any information the inquirer supplies that is likely to be useful for the purpose. If the serviceman's identity seems obvious or probable, NARA will furnish a copy of the record it thinks is the correct one.

Inquirers who are unable to supply information necessary for NARA to make an effective search of the records may examine or hire someone to examine files in the research rooms of the National Archives Building. Names of persons who do genealogical research for a fee can be obtained from genealogical periodicals, usually available in most public libraries.

Some of the information needed to order copies may be found in *Index to Revolutionary War Pension Applications in the National Archives*, Bicentennial Edition, revised and published in 1976 by the National Genealogical Society; in *Report From the Secretary of War in Relation to the Pension Establishment of the United States*, published in three volumes in 1835 as State Document 514, 23d Congress, 1st session; and in *List of Pensioners on the Roll January 1, 1883*, published in five volumes in 1883 as Senate Executive Document 84, 47th Congress, 2d session. These publications are available in most large public libraries and in research libraries.

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