RESOURCE:
Using Military Records for Genealogy

Thomas MacEntee, Abundant Genealogy   https://abundantgenealogy.com

Military Records: A Great Resource for Genealogy

Throughout your ancestors' lives it is likely that they or a family member served in the military. Military records can provide valuable insights into the lives of your ancestors. Many records can also provide vital record information and even data on those who didn't serve but were related to the ancestor.

Record Types

Depending upon the time period and location, you should be able to locate the following types of military documents … online as well as in-person at archives and repositories. For the United States, you should search for:

- **Service Records:** Contains information about the ancestor's involvement with the military. These include compiled service records, medical records, and more.

- **Draft Records:** Military conscription records consisting mainly of "draft card registration" forms. Information includes name, age, residence, occupation, marital status, physical description and more.

- **Enlistment Records:** Offer much of the same information found in Draft Records above. Includes information on military unit including company or regiment. Also includes Muster Rolls listing date and location of enlistment and muster.

- **Discharge Records:** Difficult to locate, discharge records take different forms depending upon the time period and location. For instance, the discharge certificates for US military service from 1865 to 1944 were kept by family members. Also check on the state level for discharge records.

- **Pension Records:** Contain an amazing amount of data including basic vital record data; service information; information on spouse and children; disability information; and affidavits/statements of friends, families and neighbors.

- **Retirement Home Records:** Check for soldier home registers online, at the National Archives (US) as well as state archives. These registers often cover three areas: military service, domestic information (birthplace, residence, etc.), as well as data on the veteran's pension, date of admission, death date, and burial.

- **Bounty Land Warrants:** Between 1755 and 1855, the US federal government provided land as a "bounty" for military service. In addition, some states established bounty land programs, mainly for Revolutionary War service.

- **Casualty Records:** Contain information on a military ancestor who died in combat. Can also refer to those missing in action, captured, and injured.

- **Cemetery Records:** Online databases contain grave location information, images of headstones as well as basic vital record data such as birth date, birth location, etc.

- **Newspaper Articles:** rolls of honor (listing of those who died during a specific military conflict)

- **Veterans and Lineage Society Records:** For many US military conflicts, those who served belonged to fraternal groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic. These groups produced yearbooks or commemorative books; many available in digital form. Check lineage groups such as DAR for records as well.

Search Methodologies

Searching for military records is not as straight-forward as searching other record sets. There are so many bits of data that you need to get started:

- **Be Flexible with Dates:** Don't being your search with narrow date or location restrictions. Avoid the use of "exact search" functions and allow for a one to five year variation on service dates.

- **Search Digital Books**: Use Google Books, Internet Archive, and similar resources to locate books related to military service. Key resources include military reunion yearbooks and commemorative books related to specific wars such as the US Civil War. These are great resources for determining your ancestor's regiment and company during a military conflict.

- **Search by Home Address**: For certain military conflicts, such as World War II, newspapers would print articles listing those drafted or inducted into service as well as those who perished. Use census records, city directories or interview relatives to determine the exact home address of your military ancestor.

- **Search Census Records:** For 1910-1940 US Census records, military service information was collected including the 1890 Veterans Census which still exists!

- **Check State Records:** For early US conflicts, such as the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, state militias were formed. Determine the colony, territory or state of service and then locate those state-level records. Some states offered pensions to military as well and some discharge records are at the state level.

- **Search BOTH SIDES!:** This means, when researching ancestors involved in military conflicts, don't just focus on the "winning side." Make sure you fully research relatives who may have been on the "other side" such as Loyalists during the US Revolutionary War.

- **Don't Forget PERSI!** Remember to search the Periodical Source Index (PERSI) which contains "material and journal records from the databases of over 8,000 genealogy and history societies from all over the world."

Tips and Tricks for Using Military Records for Family History Research

Here are some ways you can use the information located in military records to improve your genealogy research:

- **Are They The Right Age to Serve?** Very often genealogists believe their ancestor served in a specific military conflict, when, in fact, they were too young or too old to have served. Use the ***Ages of Servicemen in Wars*** chart via the FamilySearch Wiki to determine military conflict periods.

- **Determine Military Service, Rank, and Division:** This is probably the most important search data needed to get started with military records. You may need to get creative … interview relatives, search for newspaper articles, etc.

- **Interview Relatives:** You may gain information as to your military ancestors' service by interviewing relatives. Use email, Zoom calls, or the telephone and try to extract as much information as you can. Also remember to share your resulting research with the relative who helped you out!

- **Understand Available Resources:** For US researchers, there is a HUGE GAP in military service records due to the National Personnel Center Fire in July, 1973. Use the FamilySearch Wiki to determine what military records exist and how they can be accessed. In addition, understand military history and the formation of branches of service. The US Air Force was actually part of the US Army prior to 1947.

- **Check Newspaper Articles:** You can find various details as to military service using historical newspapers. Look for draft notices, enlistment lists, roll of honor listings as well as articles about your ancestor and his or her military service.

- **Request Military Records:** for US records, file a *Request Pertaining to Military Records* with the National Archives. Also keep in mind that NARA will only send you selected pages they believe are pertinent to the military service. You may need to file a further request for the ENTIRE FILE which is rich in documents.

- **Check Family Photos**: Are you sitting on old family photos depicting servicemen and servicewomen? Scan the images and examine the uniform worn, any service medals and ribbons, etc.

- **Volunteer Military Service:** Did your ancestor sign up for a state militia or volunteer with the National Guard? Peacetime service also produced many military records. Remember to also check on the state level for these records.

- **Research Military Reunions:** Starting with the US Civil War, groups of veterans would meet locally on a monthly or yearly basis. These groups, like the Grand Army of the Republic would publish meeting records including yearbooks.

- **Check Yearbooks for Military Service Enlistments**: During World War I and World War II, if high school students were serving in the military, very often there might be a special section listing their names, military branch and area of service.

Resource List

General Resources

- **MyHeritage Military Records**
  https://www.myheritage.com/research/catalog/category-3000/military

- **Cyndi's List – Military Records**
  https://www.cyndislist.com/military-worldwide/

- **Google Books**
  https://books.google.com/

- **Internet Archive**
  https://archive.org/details/genealogy

Australian Resources

- *Australia Military Records* (FamilySearch)
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Australia_Military_Records

- **Cyndi's List – Australia Military Records**
  https://www.cyndislist.com/australia/military/

Canadian Resources

- *Canada Military Records* (FamilySearch)
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Canada_Military_Records

- **Cyndi's List – Canada Military Records**
  https://www.cyndislist.com/canada/military/

UK Resources

- *British Military Records* (FamilySearch Wiki)
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/British_Military_Records

- **Cyndi's List – UK Military Records**
  https://www.cyndislist.com/uk/military/

US Resources

- *9 tips on obtaining missing military records (and awards)
  for you or a loved one*
  https://www.militarytimes.com/military-honor/salute-veterans/2018/10/31/9-tips-on-obtaining-missing-military-records-and-awards-for-you-or-a-loved-one/

- **Ages of Servicemen in Wars** (FamilySearch Wiki)
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Ages_of_Servicemen_in_Wars

- **Archive Grid – Military Records**
  https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/?q=military+records&p=1&ft=1

- **Cyndi's List – US Military Records**
  https://www.cyndislist.com/us/military/

- **Genealogy 101: Military Records** (GenealogyBank)
  https://blog.genealogybank.com/?s=military+records

- **Genealogy Research in Military Records** (National Archives)
  https://www.archives.gov/research/military/genealogy

- *Military Records Tips for Beginners* (FamilySearch Wiki)
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Military_Records_Tips_for_Beginners

- **Nationwide Gravesite Locator**
  https://www.cem.va.gov/gravelocator/

- **Online Military Indexes & Records**
  https://www.militaryindexes.com/

- **PERSI** (Findmypast)
  https://www.findmypast.com/persi

- **Pritzker Military Library and Museum**
  http://www.pritzkermilitary.org/

- **Request Military Service Records** (National Archives)
  https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records

- **Research Guide for Headstone Records for U.S. Military Veterans Buried in Nonfederal Cemeteries, 1879–1985** (National Archives)
  https://www.archives.gov/files/research/military/veterans/headstones-nonfederal-cemeteries.pdf

- **Soldiers and Sailors Database** (National Archives)
  https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm

- **United States Military Old Soldiers Home Records** (FamilySearch Wiki)
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Military_Old_Soldiers_Home_Records

- **War of 1812 Pension Files** (Fold3)
  https://www.fold3.com/title/761/war-of-1812-pension-files