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

Nese F. DeBruyne

Information Research Specialist

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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 includes contact information for military history centers, websites for additional sources of research, and a bibliography of other publications.

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. Personnel records may be requested online (<http://www.archives.gov/veterans>), by mail (the appropriate address listed on the back of the form), or fax (314-801-9195) using the Standard Form 180.

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*
E-mail: MPR.center@nara.gov

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>

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 National Archives and Records Administration - College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001; telephone 301-837-3510. Online contact information is available at <http://www.archives.gov/contact/>.

Most U.S. military unit records after 1954 (except Vietnam), if they still exist, are in the custody of the Department of the Army. Information may be requested in writing from the Department of the Army, Freedom of Information Act Office, 7701 Telegraph Road, Room 102, Casey Building, Alexandria, Virginia 22315-3860.

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 E-mail: AFHRANEWS@MAXWELL.AF.MIL http://www.afhra.af.mil/index.asp	(334) 953-2395
Air Force Historical Support Division HQ USAF/HOH 3 Brookley Avenue, Box 94 Joint Base Anacostia Bolling Washington, DC 20032-5000 http://www.afhso.af.mil/	(202) 404-2264
National Museum of the U.S. Air Force 1100 Spatz Street Wright-Patterson AFB, OH 45433 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 E-mail: usarmy.mcnair.cmh.mbx.answers@mail.mil http://www.history.army.mil/	(202) 685-4042
U.S. Army Heritage & Education Center 950 Soldiers Drive Carlisle, PA 17013-5021 E-mail: usarmy.carlisle.awc.mbx.usamhi@mail.mil (research inquiries) http://usahec.org	(717) 245-3949
Coast Guard	
U.S. Coast Guard Historian’s Office (CG-09224) U.S. Coast Guard Stop 7031 2703 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE Washington, DC 20593-7031 http://www.uscg.mil/history/	(202) 372-4651 (202) 372-4653
Coast Guard Museum U.S. Coast Guard Academy 15 Mohegan Avenue New London, CT 06320-8511 http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg092/museum/	(860) 444-8511

Center or Museum	Telephone Number
Marine Corps	
Marine Corps History Division 3078 Upshur Avenue Quantico, VA 22134 https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/SitePages/Home.aspx	(703) 432-4874 (703) 432-4877
Marine Corps Heritage Foundation 3800 Fettler Park Drive Suite 104 Dumfries, VA 22025 E-mail: 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 E-mail: museum@usmma.edu http://www.usmma.edu/museum	(516) 726-6047
Navy	
Naval History & Heritage Command 805 Kidder Breese Street, SE Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060 http://www.history.navy.mil	(202) 433-3224 archives (202) 433-4132 library

Source: Table compiled by the Congressional Research Service.

Additional Sources for Research

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>

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- 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.

Author Contact Information

Nese F. DeBruyne
Information Research Specialist
ndebruyne@crs.loc.gov, 7-8096

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Military unit, a group having a prescribed size and a specific combat or support role within a larger military organization. The chief military units in the ancient classical world were the Greek phalanx and Roman legion. The units used in modern armies include the company, battalion, brigade, and division.Â Thank you for your feedback. Our editors will review what youâ€™ve submitted and determine whether to revise the article. Join Britannica's Publishing Partner Program and our community of experts to gain a global audience for your work! Share. SHARE.