U.S. Military Records: Civil War

Many families living in the United States of America participated in wars and military conflicts. The records created by officers and civilians can provide valuable details for family history and genealogy. The branches of the U.S. military include the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. Learn how to access the records stored at the National Archives and other record repositories.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Civil War or the War Between the States lasted from 1861 to 1865. The Union Army had 2,865,028 soldiers from 42 states and territories. 110,070 men died in battle and 531,339 men died from wounds or disease.

The Confederate Army had 1,141,000 soldiers from 11 states and territories. 52,954 men died in battle and 80,867 men died from wounds or disease.

SERVICE RECORDS

Service records document an individual's involvement with the military and can provide your ancestor's unit or organization. This information makes it easier to search the pension records. Service records seldom provide information about other members of a soldier's family.

Types of service records include enlistments, muster rolls, discharges, and records of separation. States also have rosters of their soldiers. The compiled military service records are arranged by war, then by state, then by military unit, then alphabetically by surname of the soldier. The card abstracts for each soldier from various records are filed in a jacket-envelope.

PENSION RECORDS

The federal government and some state governments granted pensions to officers, disabled veterans, needy veterans, widows or orphans of veterans, and veterans who served a certain length of time. Pension records usually contain more genealogical details than service records. However, not every veteran received or applied for bounty land or a pension. The appropriate federal or state agency maintained a pension file for each applicant. These files contain the application papers and any further correspondence or documents.

In a person's pension application papers, you may find his name (and sometimes his wife's maiden name); rank; military unit; period of service; residence; age; date and place of birth, marriage, and death; and the nature of his disability or proof of need. To prove that he served in the military, he may have included documents such as discharge papers or affidavits from those with whom he served. Widows or heirs had to prove their relationship to the veteran with marriage records and other documents, and the file may list the names of dependent children under the age of 16.

OBTAINING COPIES

The original records are at the National Archives. The National Archives does not perform research for patrons. When exact identifying information is given, the Archives can furnish photocopies of compiled service records, pension applications, and bounty land warrant application files.

Obtain copies of service records for wars before 1914 from the National Archives. If the records are not on microfilm, the cost is $25. You can place an order online at **www.archives.gov**.

Obtain copies of pension records before 1916 from the National Archives. If the records are not on microfilm, the cost is $75. You can place an order online at **www.archives.gov**.

VETERAN'S RECORDS AND LINEAGE SOCIETIES

A veteran could join a veterans' organization and descendants may join a lineage society. The veteran had to demonstrate service in order to join. Veteran societies include the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans.

Descendants have to establish relationship through multiple generations from the applicant to the qualifying ancestor. Lineage societies include the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (**www.suv.org**) and United Daughters of the Confederacy (**www.hqudc.org**).

DRAFT RECORDS

Since 1863, the federal government has registered millions of men who may have been eligible for military service. The Civil War enrollment records and World War I draft registration cards typically give the man's name, residence, age, occupation, marital status, birthplace, physical description, and other information. The person may not have served in active duty but still completed the draft forms.

MILITARY HISTORIES

Military histories describe major engagements, unit assignments, and where the unit served. They provide background information about the unit's military experiences. Also, use the Official Record published by the Adjutant General's Office.

INTERNET SITES

Cyndi Howell's list has military records in many categories.
   www.cyndislist.com/military.htm
FamilySearch Wiki has many pages for researching ancestors in the Civil War.
   www.wiki.familysearch.org
Ancestry, Inc. has some military record indexes.
   www.ancestry.com
The National Archives site describes the military records it stores.
   www.archives.gov/genealogy/military
Footnote has some military indexes.
   www.footnote.com

The U.S. Army Military History Institute is a repository of Army historical source material.
   carlisle-www.army.mil/usamhi
The Civil War Soldier's System continues to update their site in cooperation with the National Parks Service. They have over 5 million soldiers listed.
   www.itd.nps.gov/cwss

NATIONAL ARCHIVES MICROFILM PUBLICATIONS OF MILITARY RECORDS

The U.S. National Archives microfilmed many excellent military records. See also half-sheet guides, book indexes, and Internet sites.

Army	Service Records	Pension Records
Union	Selected States (multiple series)	Index (T288)
Confederate	All (multiple series)	None.

The following list, arranged by war, gives the title of the record, the series publication number, and the total number of microfilm rolls.

Civil War
1. Each state has an *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers . . . .* **Use the Civil War Solder's System on the Internet.** Some of the Union-compiled military services records are available on microfilm.
2. *Consolidated Index to Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers.* (Series M253.) 536 rolls. All of the Confederate-compiled military service records are available on microfilm, usually by state.
3. *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations.* (Series M594.) 225 rolls.
4. *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Confederate Organizations.* (Series M861.) 74 rolls.
5. *General Index to Pension Files, 1861–1934.* (Series T288.) 544 rolls.
6. *Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861 and 1900.* (Series T289.) 765 rolls. These films are often easier to read than Series T288, number 5 above.

7. *Veteran's Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907–1933.* (Series M850.) 2,539 rolls.
Each Confederate state has a pension index and pension application files.

PRINTED HELPS

8. Eales, Anne Bruner & Robert M. Kvasnicka, eds. *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States.* 3d ed. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2000. (FHL book 973 J53e)
> Especially Section B: Military Records in chapters 4–9.

9. Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy.* 3d ed. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000. (FHL book 973 D27g 2000.)
> Especially chapter 26 "Military Records: After the Revolution."

10. Neagles, James C. *U.S. Military Records: A Guide to Federal and State Sources, Colonial America to the Present.* Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1994. (FHL book 973 M23nu)

11. Plante, Trevor K., compiler. *Military Service Records at the National Archives.* Reference Information Paper 109. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2007.

12. Szucs, Loretto and Sandra Hargreaves Leubking, eds. *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy.* 3d ed. Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2006. (FHL book 973 D27ts 2006)
> Especially chapter 11 "Military Records" by Lloyd deWitt Bockstruck and Sandra Hargreaves Leubking.

13. *U.S. Military Records: Research Outline.* Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000. (FHL book 929.1 F21ro U.S.)