

## U.S. Military Records: Revolutionary 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 U.S. National Archives and other record repositories.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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The Revolutionary War lasted from 1775 to 1783. Approximately 300,000 soldiers fought as patriots.

### SERVICE RECORDS

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Service records document an individual's involvement with the military and can provide your ancestor's unit or organization. The Adjutant General's office compiled the military service records for all soldiers who served before 1902. The compiled service records consist of an envelope for both volunteer enlisted men and officers. 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 from various records are filed in a jacket-envelope for each soldier.

### PENSION RECORDS

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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 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 veteran'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. The pension records in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., are based on service in the armed forces of the United States between 1775 and 1916.

### OBTAINING COPIES

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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 files, and bounty land records.

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](http://www.archives.gov).

Obtain copies of pension records before 1865 from the National Archives. If the records are not on microfilm, the cost is \$50. You can place an order online at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).

### BOUNTY LAND WARRANTS

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In limited cases before 1855, the federal government offered land to a soldier as an

incentive to serve in the military or a reward for service. The soldier or his or her heirs could claim the land. The United States reserved tracts of land in the public domain for military claims. Many veterans sold or exchanged their land warrants.

## **LINEAGE SOCIETIES**

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A veteran could join a veterans' organization, and descendants may join a lineage society. Descendants have to establish relationship through multiple generations from the applicant to the qualifying ancestor.

The Library has instructions for using records from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR; [www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org)) and for the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR; [www.sar.org](http://www.sar.org)).

## **BRIEF TIMELINE FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

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5 Sep. 1774: First Continental Congress convened.

19 Apr. 1775: Battle at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts.

19 Dec. 1777: Washington's army established headquarters at Valley Forge.

19 Oct. 1781: Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia.

3 Sep. 1783: The final peace treaty was signed in Paris.

## **MILITARY HISTORIES**

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Military histories describe major engagements, unit assignments, and where the unit served. They provide background information about the unit's military experiences.

## **INTERNET SITES**

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- The National Archives site describes the military records it stores.  
[www.archives.gov/genealogy/military](http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/military)
- FamilySearch Wiki has many pages for researching ancestors in the Revolutionary War.  
[www.wiki.familysearch.org](http://www.wiki.familysearch.org)
- Footnote has images from original source documents, many from the National Archives. This Internet site requires a subscription.

### **www.footnote.com**

- Heritage Quest has images of the selected records for Revolutionary War pension files. This Internet site is available to libraries through ProQuest.  
[www.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.heritagequestonline.com)
- Cyndi Howell's list has military records in many categories.  
[www.cyndislist.com/military.htm](http://www.cyndislist.com/military.htm)
- Ancestry, Inc. has some military record indexes. This Internet site requires a subscription.  
[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)
- The U.S. Army Military History Institute is a repository of Army historical source material.  
[www.carlisle.army.mil/ahec/MHI.htm](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ahec/MHI.htm)

## **NATIONAL ARCHIVES MICROFILM PUBLICATIONS OF MILITARY RECORDS**

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

<b>War</b>	<b>Service Records</b>	<b>Pension Records</b>
Revolutionary	All (M881)	All (M804)
Post-Rev.	All (M905)	Index (T316)
War of 1812	Index (M602)	Index (M313)
Indian Wars	Selected states (multiple series)	Index (T318)
Mexican War	Selected States (multiple series)	Index (T317)

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

### **Revolutionary War**

1. *General Index to Compiled Military Service Records of Revolutionary War Soldiers.* (Series M860.) 58 rolls.
2. *Compiled Service Records of Soldiers Who Served in the American Army During the Revolutionary War.* (Series M881.) 1,096 rolls. *Available on footnote.com.*
3. *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files.* (Series M804.) 2,670 rolls. *Available on footnote.com.*

## PRINTED HELPS

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4. *DAR Patriot Index*. 3 vols. Washington, DC: NSDAR, 2003. (FHL book 973 C42da 2003)
5. 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.
6. 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 25 "Military Records: Colonial Wars and the American Revolution" and chapter 26 "Military Records: After the Revolution."
7. *Index to the Rolls of Honor in the Lineage Books of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution*. 2 vols. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing, 1998. (FHL book 973 D2d index)
8. *Lineage Book: The Daughters of the American Revolution*. 166 vols. (Washington, DC: Daughters of the American Revolution, 199-). (FHL book 973 D2d)
9. 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)
10. Plante, Trevor K., compiler. *Military Service Records at the National Archives*. Reference Information Paper 109. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2007.
11. 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.

12. *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.)

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