

BEFORE GETTING STARTED

Before getting started, there are several questions that when answered can greatly help you in your quest:

- What branch of service did the person serve in?
- Do you know the conflict they fought in or their dates of service?
- If they served in the Army, was it in the Regular Army or a volunteer unit?
- Do you know what state they were living in when they joined the military?
- Did the individual serve as an officer or enlisted man?
- Did the veteran, their widow, or a dependant apply for or receive a pension?

These questions are important, for the answers help determine which search paths to follow in researching records in our holdings.

Using the National Archives

The National Archives, established in 1935, is the official depository for records of military personnel separated from the U.S. Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps. There are two main repositories for records relating to military service, the National Archives Building, Washington, DC, and the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), St. Louis, Missouri. Listed below are some military service records that are in the holdings maintained at each facility. On subsequent pages are pertinent details about the records available.

The following records relating to military service are held at the National Archives Building in **Washington, DC**:

- Volunteer enlisted men and officers whose military service was performed during an emergency and whose service was considered to be in the Federal interest, 1775 to 1902
- Regular Army enlisted personnel, 1798–October 31, 1912
- Regular Army officers, 1798–June 30, 1917
- U.S. Navy enlisted personnel, 1798–1885
- U.S. Navy officers, 1798–1902
- U.S. Marine Corps officers and enlisted personnel, 1798–1904
- Those 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
- Confederate Army, Navy, and Marine Corps (Civil War)

For researchers unable to visit the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, copies of compiled military service records, pension files, and bounty land records held by NARA can be obtained through the mail. To obtain the proper request form, please write to Old Military and Civil Records, National Archives and Records Administration, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20408-0001. You can also request a paper form be mailed to you at: www.archives.gov/global_pages/inquire_form.html. The NATF Form 80 is now obsolete. Form 80 was replaced by NATF Form 85, National Archives Order for Copies of Federal Pension or Bounty Land Warrant Applications, and Form 86, National Archives Order for Copies of Military Service Records. NATF Forms 85 and 86 can be requested from our web site, or you may order copies of these records online at: www.archives.gov/research_room/orderonline.html.

If requesting information on military records related to Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard personnel, please do not use a form; send a written inquiry either by mail to the address above or e-mail inquire@nara.gov.

The National Personnel Records Center in **St. Louis, Missouri**, holds military personnel files for the following:

- U.S. Army officers, separated July 1, 1917–September 30, 2002, and enlisted personnel, separated November 1, 1912–September 30, 2002
- U.S. Air Force officers and enlisted personnel, separated September 25, 1947–September 30, 2004
- U.S. Navy officers, separated January 1, 1903–December 31, 1994, and Navy enlisted personnel, separated January 1, 1886–December 31, 1994
- U.S. Marine Corps officers and enlisted personnel, separated January 1, 1905–December 31, 1998
- U.S. Coast Guard officers and enlisted personnel, separated after January 1, 1898; civilian employees of Coast Guard predecessor agencies such as Revenue Cutter Service, Life Saving Service and Lighthouse Service, from 1864 to 1919

To request copies of an individual's military personnel file held at the National Personnel Records Center, use a Standard Form 180, Request Pertaining to Military Records. If you are a veteran requesting a copy of your records or next of kin of a **deceased** veteran, you may now use www.archives.gov/research_room/eve-trecs/ to order a copy of the military records online. For more information on what records are available at NPRC and who may request them due to privacy restrictions, consult the National Archives web site at www.archives.gov.

Note: The National Personnel Records Center is currently in the process of opening to the public nearly 1.2 million official military personnel files of former U.S. Navy and Marine Corps enlisted personnel who served in the military between 1885 and 1939.

This reference information paper provides further detailed information on records relating to military service at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. While the National Archives Building and the NPRC maintain military personnel records, researchers may also wish to consult unit/ship organization and operational records held in College Park, Maryland. It should be noted that only rarely do these records include information about named individuals.