

What's In My Grandpa's Military File and Where Is It?



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We discover the fact that our grandpa served in the armed forces because of a

- ♦ Federal Populations Census Schedules,
- ♦ A remembered story of overseas service [[Veterans History Project](#)],
- ♦ Letters from or pictures of a man in uniform,
- ♦ Various service ribbons and/or medals found in a drawer [[Medals of America](#)],
- ♦ A folded United States flag [[Burial Flags Frequently Asked Questions](#)], or
- ♦ Burial in a national military cemetery [[Nationwide Gravesite Locator](#)].

This leads us to additional two questions:

- ♦ What time period did they serve?
- ♦ They served in which branch?

THE MILITARY:

THE WARS:

- Spanish-American War, 1898
- Philippine Insurrection, 1899 – 1902
- World War I, 1917 – 1918
- World War II, 1941 – 1945
- Korean War 1950 – 1953
- Vietnam War 1964 – 1972

THE SERVICE:

The United States Armed Forces is made up the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard.

- United States Army (USA) – established 14 June 1775.
- United States Navy (USN) – established 27 March 1794.
- United States Marine Corps (USMC) – established 11 July 1798.
- United States Air Force (USAF) – officially established as a separate branch of the military September 18, 1947. It was initially part of the U. S. Army.
- United States Coast Guard – established in 4 August 1790 as Revenue Marine and was renamed 28 January 1915 as Coast Guard.



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THE RECORDS:

With researching military information, remember that there are different resources within different government record groups.



There are two different types of files.

- ◆ Non-archival files are the responsibility of the government's Offices, Committees, or Departments. Example: Department of Defense or Veterans Affairs for medical files.
- ◆ Archival files are the responsibility of NARA [sixty two years after separation (discharge, retirement, or death)].
 - ◇ The [National Archives](#), Washington, DC has files for veterans and their widows in military service between 1775 and 1916.
 - ◇ The [National Personnel Records Center](#) (NPRC), St. Louis, Missouri contains archived records from the 20th Century.

This division of non-archival and archival files is based on an agreement between NARA and Department of Defense. On their website, NARA has "[Military Service Records, Locations of Service Records.](#)"

OFFICIAL MILITARY PERSONNEL FILE (OMPF)

The OMPF is the military's administrative record on the service member. It contains a wide variety of information. It may contain the following things, the date of enlistment; duty stations and assignments; training courses with ratings; awards or decorations received; disciplinary actions; correspondence, insurance; emergency data; administrative remarks; date and type of separation/discharge/retirement and final payment.

The NPRC Archival Division has files for:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| ▪ Army (1912) | ▪ Marine Officer (1905) |
| ▪ Coast Guard (1898) | ▪ Navy Enlisted (1885) |
| ▪ Marine Enlisted (1906) | ▪ Navy Officer (1902) |

The OMPF transfer occurs sixty two years after separation (discharge, retirement, or death). This is a rolling date. In October 2023, OMPFs with separation date of October 1961 or earlier are archival and open to the public.

NOTE: The file does not contain the following items:

- ◆ medical/hospital records
- ◆ a listing or information on any military engagements
- ◆ payroll records
- ◆ DD-214 [This was a record given to the veteran at discharge. Some veterans filed a copy at their county recorder's office.]



THE FIRE:

On 12 July 1973, the Military Personnel Records Center was engulfed by fire. One St. Louis newspaper began their report.

A general alarm fire at the huge Military Personnel Records Center here has created an administrative nightmare which may torment the U.S. Military establishment for years to come. ①

The fire blazed out of control for days. Firemen, from around the area, pumped thousands of gallons of water per minute on the fire. Across the country, newspapers picked up the story. The fire destroyed approximately 16–18 million Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF).

- What records burned?
 - ♦ 80% of Army personnel who were discharged 1 November 1912 to 1 January 1960.
 - ♦ 75% of Air Force personnel who were discharged 25 September 1947 to 1 January 1964 with surnames alphabetically from “Hubbard, James E. through Z.”
- Is this definite?
 - ♦ A index did not exist of the files held.
 - ♦ Agencies did not sign out files on a control list.

HOW TO ACCESS THE OMPS:

FOR ARCHIVAL RECORDS

NARA has a website which provides information on how to [Request Military Service Records](#). Various professional genealogical organizations ([Association of Professional Genealogist](#) or [Board of Certification of Genealogist](#)) have members who research/pull records for a fee.

Provide the veteran’s full name, birthdate and birth place, branch of service, military status (officer or enlisted) service number with dates of service. Also include the parents’ name and if appropriate spouse name. This helps the staff locate the file quickly.

The NARA’s fee is \$25.00 for the first five pages and \$70.00 for six pages or more.

NOTE: The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) is one of the NARA’ largest and busiest operations. They service government agencies, current and former military veterans and their family members, former civilian Federal employees, and the general public.

① “Up in Smoke...,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis), 13 July 1973, p. 1, col. 1.

AUXILIARY RECORDS:

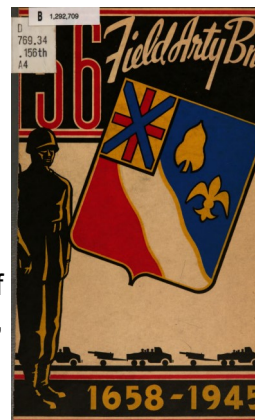
After determining the unit, you may wish to search these.

Morning reports – The Army had the morning reports which was a daily history of the company. This report detailed personnel changes for that day. It showed transfers to and from the unit, temporary assignments, leaves, promotions or disciplinary actions. Events may not appear in an individual's OMPF.

Unit Histories – The military unit histories may contain biographies of officers, rosters of soldiers in the unit, clues to where the soldiers were living when they enlisted, and possibly a residence after their service or a death place. The unit history can also give you a background as to what battles the soldiers fought and where they were located during the war.

Court-Martial – Service members who violated the Uniform Code of Military Justice faced trials by the military. These files showed the charges, witnesses, and outcome of the proceeding.

Reports – Federal departments have their specific mission to enforce and administer Federal laws. They create and produce documents and reports (budget, research, or statistical), fact sheets, handbooks, manuals, maps, charts, pictures, and pamphlets. These appear in the Government Document section of a Federal Depository Library.



RESOURCES:

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6. Schaefer, Christina. *The Great War: A Guide to the Service Records of All the World's Fighting Men and Volunteers*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1998.
7. United States. Adjutant-General's Office. Administrative Services Division. *List of Unofficial Unit Histories and Unit Associations*. Washington, DC: 1947.
8. War Department. *Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Casualty List*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946. Online. <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/navy-casualties>
9. Wilbanks, Bob. *Last Man Out: Glenn McDole, USMC, Survivor of the Palawan Massacre in World War II*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004.