

## **Tracking and Sharing an Ancestor's Civil War Story**

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**1. To begin researching an ancestor's military service:** Gather all known facts and any written or oral stories about your ancestor (use full name and any nick names). Check obituary, family Bibles, old newspaper articles, historical publications and museums/historical societies in the area where your ancestor lived. Talk to other relatives to see if anyone has already assembled any documents related to your ancestor's military service.

**2. Check the free National Park Service Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System** at the website, <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss>, to identify if your ancestor served in the Civil War and, if so, the regiment. The National Park Service has completed the online entry of 6.3 million soldier records. Efforts are continuing to enter all sailor records. The website also includes the records of 1200 CW Soldiers and Sailors who received the medal of honor and the names of Union prisoners held at the Andersonville Prison and Confederate prisoners held at Fort McHenry. Ancestry at <http://www.ancestry.com> is another source for identifying Civil War service (for a fee) or free onsite at many libraries including the **WVGS library**.

**3. Obtain pension and other military service records:**

**National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)** The National Archives holds Federal military service records in two repositories: The National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., for Revolutionary War - 1912 and the National Military Personnel Records Center (NPRC), in St. Louis, Missouri, for WWI - present. State militia records may be obtained from the appropriate State Archives.

(a) compiled military service record (CMSR); (b) pension application file; and (c) records reproduced in microfilm publication M594, *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations* (225 rolls). Each volunteer soldier has one Compiled Military Service Record (CMSR) (see website address above) for each regiment in which he served. An index is available online at the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System website or on microfilm at selected NARA facilities and large genealogical research libraries

For Confederate army soldiers, there are two major records in NARA that provide information on military service: (a) compiled military service record (CMSR) and (b) records reproduced in microfilm publication M861, *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Confederate Organizations* (74 rolls). Records relating to Confederate soldiers are typically less complete than those relating to Union soldiers because many Confederate records did not survive the war.

Paper copies of Civil War military service records can be requested online or by mail using an NATF Form 86 for **each soldier** (Volunteer Army or Regular Army). You can obtain the NATF Form 86 by providing your name and mailing address to [www.archives.gov/contact/inquire-form.html](http://www.archives.gov/contact/inquire-form.html). Be sure to specify the correct form number and the number of forms you need.

**Pension Records:** Most Union army soldiers or their widows or minor children later applied for a pension. In some cases, a dependent father or mother applied for a pension. The pension files are indexed by NARA microfilm publication T288, *General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934* (544 rolls). It is also available online for a fee at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). Heritage Quest.com also has military service information which can often be accessed free through a local library.

The pension file will often contain more information about what the soldier did during the war than the CMSR. Some records provide physical descriptions of the soldier, i.e. weight, height, color of hair, etc. Widows had to supply proof of marriage and dependent minor children proof of both the soldier's marriage and the children's birth in order to obtain the pension benefits.

Paper copies of Civil War pension records can be requested online or requested by mail using an NATF Form 85 for **each soldier** (Volunteer Army or Regular Army, Union Navy or Marine Corps). You can obtain the NATF Form 85 by providing your name and mailing address to [www.archives.gov/contact/inquire-form.html](http://www.archives.gov/contact/inquire-form.html). Be sure to specify the correct form number and the number of forms you need.

For a guide to published Union and Confederate unit histories, consult: Dornbusch, Charles E. *Military Bibliography of the Civil War*. 4 vols. New York: New York Public Library, 1971-87. To locate information on other wars, try *googling* " (fill in name) War genealogical research guides" and you will obtain a listing to use.

Determine where you can find copies of (1) the U.S. War Department -- ***War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies***. (often referred to as OR) 128 vols. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1900. Reprint, Gettysburg, PA: National Historical Society, 1971-72. Includes battle reports, other records and

correspondence of Union and Confederate regiments. [www.militaryindexes.com](http://www.militaryindexes.com) is an online source for the above compilation.

Land Grant Records are another resource for information on military service of pre-Civil War soldiers.

(2) the U.S. Naval War Records Office. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*. 30 vols. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1874-1922. Reprint, Gettysburg, PA: National Historical Society, 1971.

and (3) Hewett, Janet B., et al. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 51 vols. Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1994-97.

**3. Visit public libraries or do online library research** to find books and periodicals about Civil War (or for other wars) battles, strategies, uniforms, and the political and social context of the times. (See suggested references throughout handout.) Many libraries have made their catalogs available on the internet. Browsing the catalog of a library is a useful way to get a sense of what sort of genealogical resources are available nationwide. They are also helpful in preparing a research trip.

**4. Check Geographic Reference Tools:** Genealogical research often requires investigation of place names, town locations, and other geographic information. To find where a particular present-day location is, [Yahoo's maps](#) are convenient and efficient. To find other information about a particular town (including its county location), try the [Geographic Names Information System](#) and the [Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names](#). The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., also maintains an excellent collection of Civil War - era maps in their [Geography and Map Division](#). Consult Richard W. Stephenson's *Civil War Maps: An Annotated List of Maps and Atlases in the Library of Congress* (2nd ed., 1989) and *Mapping the Civil War: Featuring Rare Maps from the Library of Congress* (1992) by Christopher Nelson. For information on maps, plans, and charts at the National Archives, contact the Cartographic Records, Email inquiries can be sent to [carto@nara.gov](mailto:carto@nara.gov).

**5. Check the websites of lineage societies**, such as Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), DAR, and other lineage societies to see what additional information may be pertinent to your search.

**6. If possible, take a research trip to track your ancestor's service and obtain further information**, but do prepare before embarking on your trip by checking such references as Dyer's Civil War compendium and the Official Records to determine the unit's whereabouts. [Use maps](#) to pinpoint your travel itinerary. The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., also maintains an excellent collection of Civil War - era maps in their [Geography and Map Division](#). We found many NPS Rangers at Battlefield visitor centers could identify where the regiment we were researching was located during a battle.

**7. Check and/or visit all potential research sites**, but do not assume large cities will provide better information. For the Civil War, local towns often have amazing museums and historical/genealogical society records. Take the time to talk to the Park Rangers, librarians, archivists and visitor center representatives; they are well informed and can guide you to many resources.

**Libraries and Archives:** (1) National such as The Library of Congress and Lincoln's Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, IL.; (2) State libraries and Archives; (3) regional libraries; (4) county libraries; city/town libraries; (5) university libraries; (6) genealogical libraries.

**Museums and Visitor Centers:** (1) national museums and/or visitor centers at National Battlefields; the new American Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, PA; the Grand Army of the Republic Museum and Library in Philadelphia; (2) special private museums, such as The Museum of the Civil War Soldier in Petersburg, VA; the small local White Oak Museum in Northern Virginia; (3) regional and or state museums, such as The Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History in Kennesaw, GA; (4) city or town museums and visitor centers.

**Historical Centers and Genealogical Societies** at the state or local level.

**Internet Resources:** Travel the internet highway to find resources and leads. Many of the research sites listed above also have websites. See your earlier handouts on web research for more suggestions or just take a chance on using a search engine such as Google to locate your topic or ancestral name. See online CW Indexes, Records & Rosters at [www.militaryindexes.com](http://www.militaryindexes.com)

**8. Share your information with other family members and the local libraries, museums or historical societies.** However, don't just assume your ancestor was in a specific battle even if his unit was. No roll call was recorded just before a unit entered battle. Individual soldiers may have been absent due to illness, assigned to other temporary duties, desertion or other causes. Books, websites, slide shows, re-enactments, etc. are great ways to share and preserve your research.