The Greatest Generation:

Tools to Research World War II Family History

Ramsey County Library

Maplewood Library
3025 Southlawn Drive
Maplewood, MN 55109
651-704-2033

North St. Paul Library
2290 N. 1st Street
North St. Paul, MN 55109
651-747-2700

Mounds View Library
2576 County Highway 10
Mounds View, MN 55112
763-717-3272

Roseville Library
2180 North Hamline Avenue
Roseville, MN 55113
651-628-6803

New Brighton Library
400 10th Street NW
New Brighton, MN
651-724-6002

Shoreview Library
4570 N. Victoria Street
Shoreview, MN 55126
651-486-2300

www.rclreads.org
I. **1940 United States Federal Census**

A Bit of History There has been a United States Federal Census taken every ten years since 1790, when federal marshals went house-to-house unannounced, writing down the name of the head of the household and counting the other residents by category. That first Census took 18 months to complete and cost $45,000 to count 3.9 million people.

Mandated by Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution, the Census was intended by our founders as a tool of political empowerment. The count is used to determine political representation in Congress.

The Census has grown tremendously over time, as has its cost (see Figure 1, below). The questions asked of respondents during each decennial census have also changed substantially over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1790</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3.9 million</td>
<td>132.2 million</td>
<td>308.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>$45,000 to conduct</td>
<td>$67.5 million to conduct</td>
<td>$12.4 billion to conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita</td>
<td>$0.11 per capita</td>
<td>$7.56 per capita</td>
<td>$40.17 per capita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enumerators</td>
<td>1650 enumerators</td>
<td>120,000 enumerators</td>
<td>635,000 (enumerators hired for non-response follow up)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Growth of the US Census over Time

Researchers studying the Census for genealogical purposes may wish to view the questions asked in the decennial censuses. This may be done through the Census Bureau website at:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/

**Protecting Individual Privacy** There is a 72-year lag between the date any federal census was taken and the release of the detailed census records to the general public.

Accordingly, the 1940 census records were released by the U.S. National Archives on April 2, 2012. The file is the largest, most comprehensive and recent set of records containing the names of those living in 1940 – 132 million people in the continental United States.

[2]
Tens of millions of people living in the U.S. in 1940 are still living today, making this a record set that connects people with recent family records. Interest in the data is intense. A spokesperson for the National Archives said the site logged more than 22 million hits during the first four hours the information was available.

**Browsing for Records in the 1940 Census**

Indexing is currently unavailable on the NARA website: [http://1940census.archives.gov/](http://1940census.archives.gov/)

The NARA site does allow you full access to the 1940 census images, in addition to 1940 census maps and descriptions. But you have to browse for the information.

- You first need to determine the appropriate census enumeration district number, and then browse through the census images.
- The ED# may be found by searching census district maps and descriptions (a tedious process on the NARA site)
- Alternately, there is a very handy “one-step” utility at: [http://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html](http://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html)

Morse has developed many other useful “one-step” utilities and published them (along with an explanation of how and why to use them) at:
- [http://stevemorse.org/](http://stevemorse.org/)

Browsing is not an easy process, but even now, with indexing (however faulty) complete and available through NARA partner sites, it’s important to remember that browsing is available. Due to misspellings and other oddities, name searching through the indexing doesn’t always work.

**Using the National Archives Partners with Available Indexing**

At the same time that it released the 1940 Census images to the public, NARA launched a joint initiative with Archives.com, FamilySearch.com, findmypast.com, ProQuest and other leading genealogy organizations to create free, high-quality, online indexing linked to the complete set of census images. The indexing was done by volunteers recruited by NARA partners and is now in place. It may be accessed without charge at

- [https://familysearch.org/1940census](https://familysearch.org/1940census)

Within the library’s buildings, you can access the 1940 Census using Ancestry Library Edition, at:

[You must open the resource at your workstation before attempting to use the link.] Please remember that, at this point in time, more than two years since the data release, there are still many transcription errors in the 1940 Census indexing. Errors are slow to correct. Ancestry.com subscribers have tools available to offer corrections. Ancestry Library Edition users do not have the access to these tools. Family Search does not have a correction mechanism in place as yet, but if you contact them with corrections, you may get your corrections made. Indexing may vary from one partner site to another.

For example, at 1927 East 27th Street, Brooklyn, New York shown on the Census image below, the names of the family members have been alternately transcribed as follows:

![Portion of US Census, 1940 image as seen on Ancestry Library Edition](image)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Member</th>
<th>Family Search &amp; Archives.com</th>
<th>Ancestry</th>
<th>Correct Rendering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Max Wientraub</td>
<td>Max Weintranb</td>
<td>Max Weintraub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Bella Wientraub</td>
<td>Bella Weintranb</td>
<td>Bella Weintraub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Leo Wientraub</td>
<td>Leo Weintranb</td>
<td>Leo Weintraub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Norah Borzer</td>
<td>Marh Berger</td>
<td>Sarah Borger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son-in-law</td>
<td>Meyer Borzer</td>
<td>Meyer Berger</td>
<td>Mayer Borger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Marvin Penzer</td>
<td>Marvin Penzer</td>
<td>Marvin Panzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Beatrice Ellenboyen</td>
<td>Beatrice Elegibeyen</td>
<td>Beatrice Ellenbogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son-in-law</td>
<td>Cecil Ellenbogen</td>
<td>Cecil Elegibeyen</td>
<td>Cecil Ellenbogen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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![Transcription Variations and Correct Rendering for Circed Area of Figure 1](image)
As more and more customer-contributed content is offered, searching using the available indexing will become increasingly productive. Should this approach fail you, remember that the more tedious browsing approach is available.

II. Beginning with Military Records

Preliminaries

Military records often provide unique facts and insights into the lives of persons who have served in the armed forces. They may include dates of birth and death, residence, names and addresses of family members, and military rank and affiliation, among other details.

In order to find this information, it is helpful to know when and where in the armed service a soldier served, and whether he or she was in the enlisted ranks or an officer. Clues may be found in family stories, old newspaper clippings, correspondence, scrapbooks, journals or diaries, service medals and memorabilia, and photographs of the soldier in uniform. The grave marker of a veteran may contain information about military service as well. Military records may have been created in peacetime or during time of war, depending on the record type, and you may even find military records for ancestors who never served.

Upon discharge from the military, veterans were given a brief, usually single-page summary of their service. This form is now called Report of Separation (DD214) and may provide rank, service number, inclusive dates of service, dates of overseas service, principal unit,
military specialty, battles, campaigns, decorations and awards. The record copy was filed with the veteran’s Official Military Personnel File (OMPF). Many returning veterans registered their service and discharge with their county recorder’s office.

OMPFs are considered “archival” and open to the public 62 years after the service member’s separation from the military. They are housed at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Researchers are advised to schedule an appointment in advance.  http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/archival-programs/military-personnel-archival/index.html

Information on requests via the web or via mail is available at: http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/

**Fire**

It is important to note, however, that a disastrous fire in 1973 destroyed between 16 and 18 million military personnel records, including about 80 percent of Army and Army Air Force records for personnel discharged between 1912 and 1950. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard records were not affected.

![Burned Military Personnel Document: NPRC Technicians are still working to recover as much information as they can from documents like this one.](image)

Figure 5. Burned Military Personnel Document: NPRC Technicians are still working to recover as much information as they can from documents like this one.
The NPRC has gone to great efforts to salvage the 6.5 million burned and water-soaked records that remain, and is still working to reconstruct the service files from the records of other agencies, and to digitally preserve and enhance images of the burned material. Every year, the NPRC receives over a million requests for information from these records; data is needed in order to document a veteran’s eligibility for federal benefits and entitlements such as the GI Bill, Veterans Administration health services, or burial in a national cemetery. Other requests are receive lower priority.


A 2011 Archives.com article entitled “Your Ancestor's Military Records Were Destroyed? What to Do?” offers some insight into the reconstruction of fire-burned service records from alternative sources.

http://www.archives.com/experts/brandt-kathleen/military-records-destroyed.html

It appears below as Appendix I.

The Experience of War

Detailed information about a veteran's participation in military battles and engagements is not contained in the veteran’s military service record. If you have or discover information about the veteran’s service dates and principal service unit, you may be able to learn about that unit’s role during the war through historical narratives that have been published, digitized, and made electronically available by the U.S. military historical commands. There is one such command for each branch of the military:


It includes, for example, the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, (DANFS) an encyclopedic work that includes more than 10,000 ships histories. Originally published by the U.S. Navy in nine volumes from 1959 through 1991, it is now being updated online.

A link within the Photography section provides access to an Online Photographic Library, only a small fraction of images held by the Naval History and Heritage Command, but all in the public domain and each accompanied by brief explanatory information. Also here is the Navy Department Library, which offers many useful bibliographies and research guides, as well as an extensive collection of full-text publications on all aspects of U.S. naval history.
If your family member was a participant in any of the naval battles of World War II, don’t miss the “showcase” for that battle assembled on this site. Still photos, newsreels, speeches, biographies, oral history transcripts, and written descriptions are among the information sources included or linked from the showcases.

Similarly, U.S. Army Center of Military History at http://www.history.army.mil fills the same function for both the U.S. Army and, at least through the World War II period, the Army Air Corps. (The U.S. Air Force per se did not exist until 1947.) Images are a particular strength, as are books and research materials organized by historical period. The full text of the more than seventy volumes in the U.S. Army in World War II “Green Books” official history series is available on this site. http://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/collect/usaww2.html

The U.S. Marine Corps History Division at http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/ provides access to histories and photographs for this branch of the service.

U.S. Coast Guard histories, oral history transcripts, and photographs are available from the United States Coast Guard’s Historian’s Office at http://www.uscg.mil/history/. Materials specific to the Coast Guard in World War II may be found at http://www.uscg.mil/history/WW2Index.asp.
Major Data Files:

(1) U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942 (over 7 million records)

Conscription was first implemented in the United States during the Civil War and reintroduced to meet the country’s military needs during World War I. During World War II, a new Selective Service Act, signed by President Roosevelt in 1940, required that all men between the ages of 18 and 64 register for the draft.

During WWII, the Selective Service System conducted six draft registrations; these records are held collectively in two groupings at the NPRC. The first group contains records from the 4th Registration, for those men aged 45 to 64 at the time. The second group contains the Selective Service Records of the remainder of the WWII registrants, born from February 17, 1897 to July 31, 1927.

Draft records for the second group are subject to privacy restrictions. Copies of draft cards may be obtained without proof of kinship by mailing a request to:

National Archives and Records Administration
ATTN: Archival Programs
P.O. Box 28989
St. Louis, MO 63132-0989

The requisite form may be found at http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/archival-programs/other-records/na-13172.pdf Proof of death in the form of an obituary, a death certificate, or similar document is required.

The Fourth Registration, or Old Man’s Registration, was held on April 27, 1942. The purpose of this registration was to collect information on the industrial capacity and skills of men who born between April 27, 1877 and February 16, 1897. It was not intended that these men be drafted into military service but to determine if their labor skills could be used in the war effort.

The registration was intended to provide a complete inventory of U.S. manpower. Extensive questionnaires were completed but have not survived. However, with the exception of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, many of the registration cards have survived. Each record provides the individual’s name, date and place of birth, and contact name and a physical description.
When you find a record relevant to your research, follow the clues contained within it to get a better understanding of your family member’s life at the time. There are three addresses given on the draft registration card in Figure 4 – two residences, and a workplace. What did these buildings look like? Fortunately, many historical photos have been and continue to be digitized and made available via the Internet.

With not much difficulty, I located a photo archive for the City of New York that included both residential addresses. The photos were taken in the 1980s, but the year each was built is included in the data, and both buildings were extant in the 1940s.
In addition, a Google search turned up photos of the Tiffany Theater and some information about this movie house at [www.whatwasthere.com](http://www.whatwasthere.com), a site that ties historical photographs to Google Maps. Members of this site may upload an historical photo to the site, identify its date and map its location. Registration is free. Identifying information is as accurate as the knowledge of the contributing member.

**Figure 8. Enlivening the Data With Visual Images**

There are a number of other ways to find pertinent online photos.

- Do a Google search, using the keywords *historic online photo archive + place name*
Figure 9. Some Google Links to Important Minnesota Visual Resources

➢ Explore the resources of city, county, and state historical societies
➢ Check with municipal archives
➢ Search the Internet Public Library for links to photo archives at http://www.ipl.org/

This site is hosted by Drexel University's College of Information Science & Technology, and a consortium of colleges and universities with programs in information. Its authoritative guides to print and Internet resources are intended to help you get started doing research on a particular topic, both online and at your local library.

➢ Take advantage of the resources available online through the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/

The Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division has been digitizing its collections since 1994. Of its 14 million items, about 1.2 million images are currently available online. Images may be browsed by collection or searched by subject.
Maps may also assist you in bringing the printed record to life. Google Maps allows you to create a free account in which you may create and store maps of the places that are relevant to your family genealogy.

![Google Maps Screenshot](image)

**Figure 10.** Mapping it with Google Maps at https://maps.google.com/


Since that time, Google has made enhancements to the mapmaking process. The new mapping system is called My Maps; user help information is available at [https://support.google.com/mymaps/?hl=en#topic=3188329](https://support.google.com/mymaps/?hl=en#topic=3188329)
Don’t Miss an Opportunity! Thoroughly examine all of the documents you uncover with a keen and careful eye.

For example, returning for a minute to the “Old Man’s Draft” registration card in Figure 7, above, the answer the respondent gave in Line 7 to the question “Name and address person who will always know your address” almost screams for explanation. I knew from family history that this respondent was married and living with his wife and two sons in 1942. Why does he give the name and address of someone who is not his wife? Who is the person he names?

In answering this question, I was drawn into ALE’s U.S Census collection back to 1900, into images of the admission and discharge records of the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Asylum, again on ALE, into a web-based index to New York City marriage records compiled by the Italian Genealogical Society, and back to ALE for the 1925 New York State Census images. In the process, I uncovered some family history that was completely us.

Also, because the 1930 U.S. Census asked whether respondents were veterans, and I followed that line of inquiry as well to an ALE military file, New York’s Abstracts of World War I Military Service, 1917-1919, I found the service details for Seaman Second Class Louis Morris, including his Navy service number, the name of the training camp to which he was assigned, and the name of the vessel – SB 312 – a submarine chaser – on which he served.

It turned out that the training camp was photographed extensively by sociologist and documentary photographer Lewis W. Hine less than a year prior to Morris’ enlistment, and the photographs of life in that camp turned up in an Internet pictorial archive.

A Google search for World War I subchasers brought up The Subchaser Archives, a cooperative site devoted to the early history of submarine chasers, during and in the aftermath of World War I. While no picture of SC 312 appears to be currently available, the site includes a link to NavSource, which does include photos of other subchasers built in the same yard and of the same specifications. =

Like the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, NavSource provides helpful tips on retrieving data from deck logs, muster rolls, and ships histories on the officers, crew, and tours of duty in its FAQs.

It may be that I will hit a brick wall with the 1900 Census record. With names this common, and the likelihood that the surname “Morris” was changed in this country, I have had no luck so far looking for immigration records. Original copies of birth certificates, marriage certificates, and death certificates, and perhaps naturalization papers may help. In-person research in New York City’s vital records is probably indicated, and perhaps at the American Jewish Historical Society, which holds the orphanage records.

In the meanwhile, I have found considerable background material that gives me a sense of the life experiences of this man and his family.
If I want to read more about this period in time and place, a Google keyword search including the words *bibliographic essay* or *annotated bibliography* often turns up useful information. Be sure to evaluate the source for its authoritativeness. For example, a search using the key words *bibliographic essay Pearl Harbor* yields this list:

![Google search results for Pearl Harbor essays](image)

**Figure 11. Using Google to Find Authoritative Sources**

Pay attention to the credentials of the compiler and the sponsoring organization (when applicable), and the care with which sources have been identified and documented.

Alternately, there are “pathfinders” from the *ipl2: information you can trust* website, mentioned above. For example:
Figure 12. IPL2 Pathfinder on World War II (partial) [http://www.ipl.org/div/pf/entry/48549]
If you identify print material that you would like to explore, please start your search for this material with the Ramsey County Library catalog. If what you need is not owned by the Ramsey County Library, it is possible for us to obtain that material for you from another U.S. library which does own it. This process is called Interlibrary Loan. It is a free service the primary tools for which – the **MNLink Gateway** and **WorldCat** – are linked on the library’s website. From the Research tab, choose Subject Guide, Books and Reading, and then Minnesota Library Information Network (MnLINK) or WorldCat.

**Figure 13. The Interlibrary Loan Network**

Key points to remember about the Intelibrary Loan process include the need to

- Allow sufficient time for requests to be filled
- Be careful of format
- Be prepared for possible “in library use only” restriction
- Pay attention to limits

Remember that the service is discretionary on the the part of the owning library and provide details for possible photocopy if the owning library is unwill to loan the original material.

You may place your own requests using **MNLink** for Minnesota holdings, or may ask for the assistance of a member of the reference staff. You must get help from a reference librarian for materials held within the United States but outside of Minnesota.
While World War II draft records for all but the “Old Man’s Draft” are still subject to privacy restrictions, enlistment records are more easily accessible, through Ancestry Library Edition, Family Search, and the National Archives Access to Archival Databases (AAD) files.

This file of basic service data was reconstructed from microfilm of the computer punch cards of 1938-1946 Army enlistments, a project undertaken in response to the loss of military personnel records in the 1973 NPRC fire.

It was completed in 2002 and includes the majority, but not all, of the men and women who served in the Army during World War II.

Information includes:

- Name of enlistee
- Army serial number
- Residence (county and state)
- Place of enlistment
- Enlistment date
- Grade
- Army branch
- Term of enlistment
- Birthplace
- Year of birth
- Race and citizenship
- Education
- Marital status.

It should be noted that both the quality of the microfilm and the process of converting these records from punch cards to microfilm to a modern, digital file resulted in the inevitable introduction of file errors.

NARA offers searching suggestions in the **Getting Started Guide** found at [http://aad.archives.gov/aad](http://aad.archives.gov/aad), as well as an article on how the enlistment file came to be in AAD, along with some tips and pointers for finding records in the file at [http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/aad-ww2.html](http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/aad-ww2.html)
Figure 14. Comparison of Output from the AAD (left) and Ancestry (right) WWII Army Enlistment Files

Of the file providers, Ancestry and Family Search are more readable, and Ancestry is most forgiving of spelling variants in returning records. Ancestry does not include the Army serial number in its record per se; it may be found in the source information provided.

(3) **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010** (over 14 million records)

The BIRLS (Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem) Death File is a Veterans Benefits Administration database that lists information for deceased individuals who had received benefits from the Veterans Administration while they were alive. These include veterans who received educational benefits and veterans’ survivors who applied for benefits. Details listed in the index can include

- name
- gender
- birth and death dates
- Social Security Number
- cause of death (unknown, natural, combat, other)
- branch(es) of service
- enlistment date(s)
- release date(s)
The veteran’s name has been added by cross-referencing the Social Security number in the BIRLS Death File with the Social Security Death Index. No names were provided directly in the BIRLS Death File.

If the veteran had no Social Security Number, the number given may be for a beneficiary rather than the veteran.

For questions, use the SS# decoder at http://stevemorse.org/ssn/ssn.html to determine date and place of issue.

If the Social Security Number is not visible on the record index it is because Ancestry.com does not provide this number in this database for any person who has passed away within the past 10 years.

Some other useful Ancestry Library Edition military sources are listed in Appendix I.

III. The Veterans History Project

Congress authorized the Veterans History Project in 2000, directing it to collect, preserve and make accessible the firsthand remembrances of U.S. war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from those who served and better understand the realities of war.”
Housed within the Library of Congress’ American Folklife Center, the collection covers veterans’ experiences from World War I forward, and includes audio and videotaped interviews and written memoirs, letters, postcards, diaries, photographs, drawings and scrapbooks.

The experience of civilians who were actively involved in supporting the war effort is also documented. The Project invites and encourages additions to its collections. The online site at http://www.loc.gov/vets/ provides the necessary explanations and forms, as well as a searchable index to the existing resources and many digitized files.

Researchers may also schedule an appointment to visit the American Folklife Center and consult materials which have not yet been digitized.

Figure 16. Searching the Veterans History Project
IV. Finding More

(1) Family Search Tutorials

Figure 17. Finding Online Classes at Familysearch.org

or go directly to: https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/home.html

Familysearch.org is the official site of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon Church), for which genealogical research is a religious pursuit. Hundreds of tutorials are available, of varying length, at differing levels of complexity, and in various formats (audio, video, slides, etc.) Included are many that deal with aspects of military record searching.
The place to begin exploring the vast resources for Minnesota genealogical research made available by the Minnesota Historical Society is at http://www.mnhs.org/genealogy/.

Of particular interest to anyone exploring the World War II period is the link to Family History Research, and the subsequent link to the subcategory Military. Here you will discover, for example, that you may find information by war, and, that for World War II, the Historical Society collections include a resource of 98 reels of microfilm titled Military Service Record Cards, which includes service record cards for persons who entered federal military service via the Minnesota National Guard. Data includes: name, service number, where and when enrolled, age or birth date, residence, birth place, dates and places of service, service unit, rank or rating, where and when discharged, next of kin (World War II), and (for Home Guards) civilian occupation. What you see on the website is a description of the resource. Using it will require a trip to the Historical Society itself.
Legislation enacted in Minnesota in 1949 approved bonus payments to Minnesota residents who served honorably in the United States armed forces for at least 30 days from December 7, 1941 until September 2, 1945, or to their beneficiaries. An application for these payments included data on the veteran’s military service and proof of honorable discharge, usually a copy of the discharge certificate. The collection includes 157 reels of microfilm, arranged by claim number.

Fortunately, there is an index to the collection as well, arranged by veteran’s name, providing the claim numbers. This finding aid is also in microfilm format, 48 rolls this time. A trip to the Historical Society is again in order.
The Minnesota Adjutant General is the administrative head of the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs and the leader of the Minnesota National Guard. In 1927, the Adjutant General was given responsibility to maintain a permanent registry of the graves of all persons who served in the military or naval forces of the United States and whose remains are buried in Minnesota. This responsibility was transferred to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs in 1943, and in 1947, the funeral director overseeing the burial was required to complete the form and forward it to the state. The graves registration program was eliminated from the duties of the Veterans Affairs Department in 1969, although some reports were filed until about 1975. There were about 70,000 forms filed between 1927 and 1975.

The file includes only veterans who are buried in Minnesota. Those veterans who enlisted from Minnesota, lived in Minnesota, or who died in Minnesota but are buried elsewhere (including overseas) will not be found here.

The Minnesota Historical Society hosts an online index to these reports at http://people.mnhs.org/vgri/

![Figure 20. Veterans Graves Registration Index](image-url)
If you find a relevant record in the index, a copy may be ordered from the Historical Society, at a cost of $8, or you may view the report at the Historical Society and obtain copies for a nominal cost. When completely filled out, reports include:

- full first, middle, and last name of the veteran
- date and place of enlistment
- serial number, rank, and unit of the veteran
- date and place of discharge
- legal residence
- date and place of birth (usually city, county, and state or country)
- date and place of death (usually city, county, and state or country)
- name and address of next of kin
- date and place of burial, name and location of the cemetery, and location of the grave (sometimes even the name of the funeral director)

(5) Social Networking – Cyndi’s List

Social Networking is not available in Ancestry Library Edition. To find other avenues to interact with genealogical researchers, try Cyndi’s List, at www.cyndislist.com. The site is an annotated bibliography of internet resources of interest to genealogists.

![Cyndi's List Home Page](image)

**Figure 21. Cyndi’s List Home Page**
Social Networking for Genealogy is just one Cyndi’s List category. Click on Categories to view the complete list. The site has been in place for over 18 years. It contains over 330,000 genealogy links, grouped in more than 200 categories. There are about 350 links for World War II.

The site is continually updated and welcomes additions and corrections from its users through its Submit a New Link and Report a Broken Link options at the bottom of the home page. Use of the site is free. You may search for keywords in the dialog box at the upper right, or choose from among the list of categories. For World War II, scroll down the alphabetical list to the W’s and then choose a subcategory.

You’ll note that these can be specialized, and, indeed Cyndi’s list is a great place to find sources of information for the specific topics that are relevant to your personal research.
Your Ancestor's Military Records Were Destroyed? What to Do?
by Kathleen Brandt | Aug 4, 2011

The July 12, 1973 fire at the St. Louis National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) destroyed approximately 80% of Army personnel records from 1 Nov 1912 to 1 Jan 1960; and, 75% of the Air Force records from 25 Sep 1947 to 1 Jan 1964. In all, between 16 and 18 million military service files, including those for WWI and WWII, were destroyed. However, this loss should not discourage researchers from uncovering an ancestor's military experience.

With a bit of perseverance and legwork family researchers can rebuild an ancestor's military service history using alternative sources. The result may be confirmation of military service dates, troop activities, discharge data, a list of awards and decorations, and perhaps even a peek at your veteran's medical information.

Getting Started

To begin the process of reconstructing your veteran's military experience, first gather vital information, such as birth date and place of birth, as well as death date and social security number (if applicable). Your veteran's unique service number may also be needed. Through the use of ledgers from enlistment stations and service number indexes, the NPRC can usually determine your ancestor's service number.

This information will be used to complete the Request Pertaining to Military Records, Standard Form 180 (SF-180) Military Record Requests Using Standard Form 180 (SF-180).

With the help of state and federal agencies, the NPRC has been diligently reconstructing veteran personnel files. Fire damaged records are stored in a climate-controlled area and treated for mold by NPRC preservationists' technicians. It is possible that your veteran's entire service file was salvaged, or has been partially restored or reconstructed. When received, the NPRC will use the SF-180 form to retrieve available documents or may inform the researcher that the veteran's file is in the process of being reconstructed.

Useful Resources

Upon discharge, each veteran is presented with papers that outline their military service including unit information, rank, dates of service and discharge. These discharge papers, now referred to as Report of Separation (DD214), may list date and place of entry into active duty and home address at time of entry. It provides any battles and campaigns that the veteran participated in, as well as decorations, medals, citations and campaign awards. It also lists
service outside Continental US specifying the destination, date of departure and arrival. The reason for separation and the home address after separation is also included. For more information on DD214 reference [About Military Service Records and Official Military Personnel Files](#).

Copies of discharge papers were stored in the veteran's personnel file and few were saved after the 1973 fire. Although it is possible to locate copies of the originals held by employers, funeral homes, or within the Adjutant General records, most likely the researcher will have to use Last Pay Vouchers, Veteran Affairs (VA records), Passport Applications, and naturalization records as alternate sources to finding vital information held on the DD214. Reconstructing this information is the key to rebuilding your ancestor's military service file.

**Last Pay Voucher**

A collection of 19 million final pay vouchers is available and may be used as a primary source for reconstructing military service records lost in the 1973 fire. Often the SF-180 response to a researcher's inquiry will verify the existence of a veteran's Last Pay Voucher. If available, the NPRC will provide ordering instructions (usually a fee of $20.00) for the researcher to obtain a...
pay voucher. Even this lone record can reveal a military footprint of your ancestor's service history.

Although this last pay voucher may appear to be a sheet of scribbles and numbers, a keen eye may uncover some interesting hints. If the service number was not known prior, it can usually be found on the voucher. Place and date of enlistment, along with rank, company and regiment may be named. The discharged date and any information where the veteran was stationed will be specified. Itemized payments allocated for overseas service will also be itemized on the final pay voucher.

If the veteran received any decorations - medals or ribbons - this too will be listed and replacement medals and ribbons may be ordered. For ordering information visit Military Awards and Decorations.

Be sure to note if travel pay was granted. Where the veteran chose to reside upon discharge is normally noted with the travel pay allocation. This information may assist the researcher in locating a copy of the DD214 held at the state's Adjutant General's office.

**Adjutant General Records**

The Adjutant General, appointed by the state Governor (except for Vermont, Washington, D.C., and South Carolina), is the state's senior military officer and "de facto" commander. The Adjutant General's office has historically held military records for the state. Upon discharge, veterans were instructed to register their military service with the local VA offices. This information was filed with the state Adjutant General's office. If the military discharge was registered, the Adjutant General's Office may hold copies of the original separation or DD214 papers.

To solicit a copy of your veteran's DD214 from the Adjutant General's Office you may need to submit the SF-180 form. Due to archival space, Adjutant General's archived records, up to WWII, may be held at the State Historical Society or within the State Archives.

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA Records)**

Many of the veteran service records were on loan to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) prior to the fire, leaving them intact. If the veteran or beneficiary filed a claim before July 1973, the VA may have information. If the VA claim was made after 1973, the veteran had to prove military service, so the VA office may already have a partially reconstructed personnel file and may be able to aide the researcher in locating claim files.
Recently while searching for a veteran's file, the VA was able to determine which Veteran's Record Center was holding the record I needed. In this case it was the VA Records Center in Dayton, OH. The file revealed an unknown medical condition to the family, plus, a medical discharge letter explaining the "Certificate of Disability for Discharge."

Local VA offices may also be of assistance. To verify VA information call toll free number at 1-800-827-1000.

**Medical-Related Alternate Records**

In 1988, a collection of computer tapes containing ten million hospital/treatment facility admission records was transferred to the NPRC. To initiate a search of Medical-Related Alternate Records complete Form 13055, Request for Information Needed to Reconstruct Medical Data, [PDF here](#). This is the most comprehensive collection to reconstruct military medical records.

**Death Certificate/Funeral Records**

Funeral records and death certificates should be checked for additional veteran's information. These records may hold copies of separation papers or the DD214. Death certificates may specifically list injuries or illnesses caused during military service. For burial benefits, additional veteran information may even be scribbled in the margin.

**Morning Report**

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When reconstructing a veteran's service record, information on troop activities, actions, and daily routines can be helpful. This can be found in daily Morning Reports. Army Morning Reports are available at the NPRC for 1 November 1912 to 1974. Air Force Morning reports are available from September 1947 to June 30, 1966. For detailed information on availability see Morning Reports and Unit Rosters.

Morning Reports are available on microfilm and are not indexed by individuals. They list activities such as promotions or demotions, those killed, wounded or missing in action. Service personnel being assigned to a unit, or leaving a unit; and those going to a hospital for treatment are also specified by name.

In order to access a Morning Report, the veteran's exact unit of assignment must be known including division/ regiment and company name that can be obtained from the Final Pay Voucher, Separation Papers or VA information.

**Other Helpful Sources**

Local newspapers clippings may be used to fill in the missing pieces. Area newspapers often reported on those wounded during military service. They also may give additional genealogical information (i.e. a parent's name). Be sure to also check with hometown military museums as they often chronicled local veteran's military service.

Regiment associations or alumni group records, books, and diaries may provide additional troop activities. These records often list veterans by name.

Two resources often forgotten when rebuilding ancestral military service are naturalization and passport applications. Naturalization papers may have military service data, especially if your immigrant ancestor was naturalized while serving in WWI or WWII.
While researching a veteran recently, I found extensive military information on a passport application, specifying the veteran's WWI service in France, complete with dates of overseas service and where the veteran was stationed!

**Recreating the Complete Picture Piece by Piece**

By compiling the information recorded on Last Pay Vouchers and Adjutant General Records, the researcher will begin to rebuild an ancestor's DD214 data. A thorough analysis of information provided by VA records and death and funeral records, and a bit of midnight oil, will be able to recreate a detailed look into your veterans' service experience.
APPENDIX II: OTHER ANCESTRY MILITARY FILES FOR WWII RESEARCH

**U.S. Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963** (nearly 2 million records)

On March 3, 1873, Congress granted burial rights in national military cemeteries to all honorably discharged veterans of the Civil War. Six years later Congress extended the privilege of government-provided gravestones to soldiers buried in private cemeteries.

The applications for headstones contained in this database were made between 1925 and 1963, but do include veterans of conflicts going back to the Revolutionary War.

**U.S. Veterans Gravesites, ca.1775-2006** (over 6 million records)

This database is a compilation of U.S. veterans’ and dependents’ burial records from a variety of sources and cemeteries. Information varies from source to source, but may name of deceased, birth date, death date, interment date, burial location/site, cemetery name and address, relationship to veteran, veteran service dates, military rank, and military branch.

**U.S. World War II Navy Muster Rolls, 1938-1949** (over 33 million records)

Muster rolls were quarterly lists of enlisted naval personnel attached to each ship, station or activity. Information usually includes:
- Name of enlistee
- Rating (occupation/specialty)
- Service number
- Date reported for particular duty or on board
- Date of enlistment
- Name of ship, station or activity
- Ship number or other numeric designation
- Date of muster roll

Personnel changes (transfers, promotions, demotions, departure from or return from leave, inpatient medical status, and deaths) that occurred between quarters were compiled monthly and are found in between each quarter’s muster roll.

**U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1798-1958**

An index to U.S. Marine Corps muster rolls from 1798-1958.

**U.S. Rosters of World War II Dead, 1939-1945**

An index of those who died in World War II from all U.S. armed services, along with rank, service number, race, religion, and place of burial.
After the United States entered World War II, the military’s needs quickly brought on a nursing shortage. Federal funds began flowing to nursing schools in 1942, and in 1943 Congress authorized the Cadet Nurse Corps, which offered scholarships for tuition and fees, stipends, and uniforms to women ages 17–35 who went to nursing school and committed to serve in the nursing profession for the duration of the war. The Corps graduated almost 125,000 nurses.

This database contains Cadet Nurse Corps membership cards providing details on women who joined the Corps.

This database contains a list of WWII active duty military personnel serving in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, who were either:
- killed in action, died of wounds, or lost lives as result of operational movements in war zones
- Missing in action
- Wounded in action
- Died or killed in while prisoners of war
- Released from prison camps

Name, rank, and next-of-kin contact information are provided.

Compiled by the National Jewish Welfare Board and affiliated agencies, this file attempts to document the role of Jewish servicemen in US armed forces during World War II.

Information on approximately 140,000 U.S. officers and soldiers, as well as U.S. and some Allied civilians who were prisoners of war (POWs) during World War II.

Service information for New York National Guard enlisted men and noncommissioned officers activated for federal service during World War II.

Cruise books are yearbook-style books put together by volunteers on board ship to commemorate a deployment. They usually include portraits of the sailors, officers, and other personnel aboard the ship, accompanied by the individual’s surname and naval rate. You may also find candid photographs of crew members at work, details and history of the ship, and short biographies of prominent officers.

You can search by ship name, ship ID, year, and name of crew member, and, if you have difficulty finding someone, you can browse by ship name and year.