

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

FINDING INFORMATION ON PERSONAL PARTICIPATION IN WORLD WAR II



Nearly 16 million Americans served in uniform during World War II. Many others supported the war effort by working in a civilian capacity for the U.S. Government such as for defense industries or as agricultural workers. The National Archives and Records Administration has custody of many records relevant to personal participation in World War II.



GETTING STARTED: POSSIBLE FAMILY SOURCES

Upon discharge from the military, veterans received a brief, usually a single page, summary of their service. For Army enlisted personnel this was War Department Adjutant General's Office Form 53, Enlisted Record and Report of Separation. The other services had similar forms. There were also summary statements for discharged officers. These are a key source for information about an individual's service including rank, service number, inclusive dates of service, dates of overseas service, principal unit, military occupation specialty, battles and campaigns, and decorations and awards. This type of information is important when attempting to locate other documents such as records about the unit/ship in which a service member served. The record copy of this form was filed in the service member's Official Military Personnel File (OMPF). Normally, the veteran received a copy of the form. Some veterans may have had their form recorded or registered at their county courthouse. It was not uncommon for returning veterans to visit their local county

courthouse and register their service and discharge with the county recorder's office. Is there a copy of this form, or other similar records, in your attic?

Archival Research Catalog (ARC)

www.archives.gov/research/arc/

ARC is the online catalog of NARA's nationwide holdings in the Washington, DC, area, regional archives, and Presidential Libraries. ARC currently contains descriptions of 50 percent of National Archives records and over 125,000 digital images of selected historical documents and photographs.

Access to Archival Databases (AAD)

www.archives.gov/aad/

AAD gives you online access to a selection of historic databases preserved permanently in the National Archives. These electronic records identify specific persons, geographic areas, organizations, and dates. The records cover a wide variety of civilian and military functions and have many genealogical, social, political, and economic research uses.

National Archives web site: www.archives.gov

For inquiries: www.archives.gov/contact/inquire-form.html

INDIVIDUAL PERSONNEL FILES

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), Military Personnel Records, has custody of the personnel files for individuals who served in the Army, Army Air Forces, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard during World War II.

In July 1973, a fire destroyed 85 percent of the Army and Army Air Forces individual personnel files, but the NPRC staff often is able to locate basic information relevant to a person's service from other records in their custody. The fire did not affect records of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

The preferred method of requesting information from NPRC is via the web at <http://vetrecs.archives.gov>. Written requests

may be submitted on Standard Form 180 (SF 180), Request Pertaining to Military Records. This form and other information about NPRC can be found at <http://archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/get-service-records.html>.

The National Personnel Records Center, Civilian Personnel Records (CPR), has personnel files for individuals who worked for the U.S. Government as civilian workers. War Production Board files of the so-called “Dollar-a-Year” men are in the custody of CPR. Specific information on how to access these files is available at <http://archives.gov/st-louis/civilian-personnel/>.

Requests for personnel information on Merchant Marine seamen from World War II should be submitted to the U.S. Coast Guard, National Maritime Center, Director (NMC-4A), 4200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 510, Arlington, VA 22203-1804.

PARTICIPATION IN THE MILITARY

World War II Military Unit / Ship Records

The National Archives has most records of Army, Army Air Forces, Marine Corps, and Navy units and ships that fought in World War II. These records vary in arrangement, content, and completeness, but all focus on documenting unit/ship organization and operations. Only rarely do they include information about named individuals. In order to search these records, you will need to know the exact designation of the unit/ship in which the service member served (e.g., Company A, 16th Infantry, 1st Division; 249th Engineer Combat Battalion; 1921st Quartermaster Truck Company; or USS *Missouri*) and the approximate dates of service.

Army and Marine Corps unit records include a variety of document types, including unit histories (narratives or collections of documents), after action reports, unit journals (usually a log of messages sent and received by a unit), and orders, including general orders issued by a unit indicating individu-



als who received a decoration or award. For the Army Air Forces, we have combat operations records (“mission reports”) for some units (mostly for bomber and fighter groups that fought in Europe) that provide operational details on missions flown against a specific target or on a particular day.

Operations of Navy ships and other activities are documented through deck logs of ships and other craft afloat, which contain information about ship movements and administration for each of the six daily four-hour watches. Ships, aviation units, task organizations, and shore stations also prepared monthly war diaries (usually daily narrative entries, but not as detailed as ship deck logs) and action reports (prepared only after a significant combat action).

Records of Navy ships crewed by Coast Guard personnel and serving as part of Navy task organizations are in Modern Military Records. Logbooks, muster rolls, and other records of Coast Guard vessels and stations, operated solely as a Coast Guard function, are in the Coast Guard records in Old Military and Civil Records.

Merchant Marine Records

A merchant marine casualty file can be found in RG 26, Deceased and War Casualty Seaman’s Records, 1937–50, located at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. This series is arranged alphabetically and may provide death date, name of vessel, application of seaman’s certificates, copy of telegram announcing death, certificates of discharge from vessels, next-of-kin information, and a photograph of the seaman.

The logbooks document the names

and assignments of crew members, drills conducted during the voyage, brief descriptions of situations and events and some personnel-related information. Some of the regional archives hold official merchant marine logbooks for ports served by that region. Some have declassified merchant marine “secret logbooks” from 1942–45, that may contain more specific information than the official logbooks. Also, a national regional database, available at most of our regional archives, provides vessel names and voyage dates for various ports.

Army Enlistment Records

The electronic database of World War II Army Enlistment Records contains approximately 9 million records of men and women who enlisted in the Army between 1938 and 1946. It does not include records for officers or for all enlistees. There are known gaps in the coverage of this database (some records could not be converted to a digital form) and in the data within records for some individuals. The enlistment records contain basic information about the individual, including service number, name, residence, place and date of enlistment, and year of birth. The records are accessible through AAD at www.archives.gov/aad and by clicking on the link “World War II.”



Records of the Selective Service System, 1926–71, Draft Registrations (of the Fourth Registration)

Selective Service records for individuals who served during World War II (except for fourth registration cards) are in the custody of the Records Division, Selective Service System, 1515 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22209-2425. The person's full name, date of birth, and legal address at the time of registration should be included in your request. There are two types of records: ledgers and cards. The ledgers are in the public domain and not restricted by privacy. The cards are considered personal information and written permission for release, a death certificate, and/or an indication the information is requested for genealogical purposes should accompany the request for copies of the cards.

World War II Selective Service System draft registration cards for men born April 28, 1877, through February 16, 1897 (known as the Fourth Registration), are available from our regional facilities. Each card has information such as the individual's name, address, date and place of birth, signature, race, height, and weight. Using the search phrase

"Fourth Registration," consult ARC at www.archives.gov/research/arc for more information.

Prisoner-of-War (POW) Records

About 130,000 American service members were captured by the enemy during World War II. The National Archives has records that list the names of individual POWs. To search records in our custody, a researcher needs to have the name of the POW, rank, service number, and approximate date and place of capture.

In addition, the electronic records series Records of World War II Prisoners of War contains about 143,000 records of U.S. military personnel and U.S. and Allied civilians who were held as prisoners of war or internees by Japanese or German powers. The record for each individual includes information such as name, serial number, detaining power, POW or internment camp, report date, and unit. The electronic records series World War II Prisoners of the Japanese Data File contains some additional information compiled by a volunteer organization about prisoners of war held by the Japanese. Both series of records are accessible through AAD at www.archives.gov/aad and by clicking on the link "World War II."

Casualty Files

There is considerable documentation among many different series of records in the National Archives relating to casualties, but normally it is very difficult to locate information about a specific individual casualty. One notable exception pertains to Army Air Forces personnel whose plane crashed or was shot down while

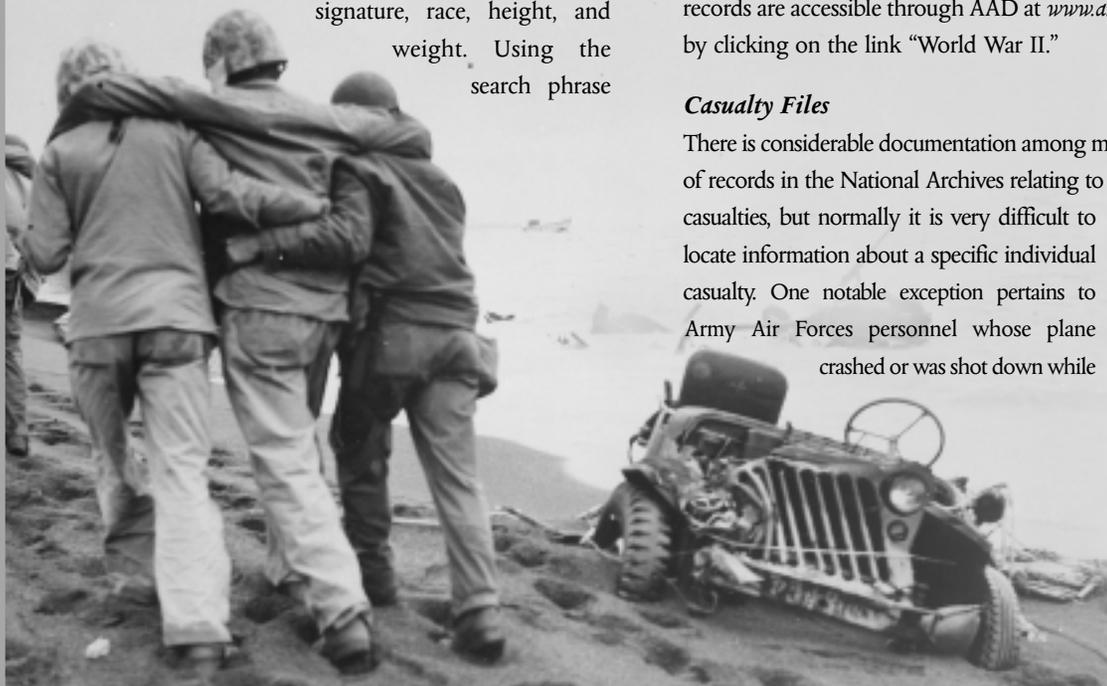
on operational missions. Beginning in June 1943, such individual losses were documented by a "missing aircrew report" (MACR) prepared by the unit to which the individual was assigned. Name, rank, service number of one or more crew members, or aircraft serial (tail) number is needed to search the series of MACRs in the National Archives. However, these records are also limited in that at least 30 percent of all operational losses are not documented by a MACR. Also a MACR documents only losses on combat missions when the plane came down in non-friendly territory.

Service numbers for men killed in action and who served in the Army or the Army Air Forces can be found in the World War II casualty lists available through ARC at www.archives.gov/research/arc/ww2/.

The Federal Government provides headstones for deceased members and veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces when a family member has applied for one. Applications for Headstones, 1925–63, for U.S. Army personnel are in the custody of the National Archives and include the name of the deceased, unit designation, serial number, dates of service, date of death, and place of burial. To search these records, a researcher needs to know the year the application was made and the name of the deceased. Using the search phrase "Applications for Headstones and Army," consult ARC at www.archives.gov/research/arc/ for more information.

Individual casualty files exist for service members who died while on active duty. The custodian of these records for Army personnel is the Army Casualty and Memorial Affairs Operation Center, U.S. Army Human Resources Command, TAPC-PED, 2461 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22331-0482. Navy files are

at the Military Medical Support Office, Mortuary Affairs Section, P.O. Box 886999, Great Lakes, IL 60088-6999. Information about Marine Corps casualties can be obtained from the Office of Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Headquarters Marine Corps, 3280 Russell Avenue, Quantico, VA 22134-5103.



RECORDS ON OTHER TOPICS RELATED TO “PERSONAL PARTICIPATION”

Cadet Nurse Corps Files

In June 1943, Congress passed the Bolton Act, which set up the Cadet Nurse Corps program in the Public Health Service (RG 90). Cards were kept for each cadet and include the name of the cadet, where and when she attended nursing school, where and when she completed her training, hometown, and how she learned about the program. In order to search the cards, the requester needs to provide the state, city, and name of the nursing school. As of this date, former Cadet Nurses have not received military recognition by Congress and are not eligible for veterans' benefits.

Japanese Internment and Relocation Records

Several sources of information concerning Japanese American families interned during World War II are listed on the National Archives web site at www.archives.gov/genealogy/heritage/japanese-americans.html. There is also an electronic database of Japanese American internees evacuated from Washington, Oregon, and California and sent to relocation centers. It is searchable by name and can be accessed through the National Archives web page at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/> then click on “World War II.”

Civilian Participation at Home

Since the civilian defense structure during World War II was largely voluntary, the administrative records in NARA custody do not include files on or lists of volunteers such as air raid wardens, etc.

If your family member worked in a factory or defense plant during the war, the National Archives may have custody of files relating to these companies, but these files rarely include information about individual workers.

Rationing was an essential part of the war effort on the home front. Although the National Archives has copies of blank ration books and other forms and information concerning rationing, our holdings do not include records of recipients.

Presidential Papers

The Presidential Libraries of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower have rich collections related to World War II, including materials on personal participation. The holdings of these Libraries include letters from individual soldiers and sailors and their family members; documents on awards, medals, and citations requiring Presidential approval; and letters of condolence from the President to the families of select servicemen. In its World War II Participants and Contemporaries collection, the Eisenhower Library has over 80,000 pages of personal papers, diaries, printed material, and photographs of veterans who served overseas or on the home front. For a list of all Presidential Libraries, go to www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/contact/libraries.html.

SPECIAL MEDIA RECORDS PERTAINING TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War became the first U.S. conflict to be documented visually through the use of film and photography on a large scale. Waves of U.S. Government photographers and artists risked and, at times, gave their lives in capturing the most defining moments of the war, leaving the public with a legacy of millions of photographs and images. Combat footage and newsreels were used to document all aspects of the war, while propaganda and training films were produced to generate support for the war amongst military inductees and the civilian population. The rapid acceleration of the use of aerial photography for military operations and intelligence gathering led the Army Map Service to produce thousands of detailed, topographic maps for areas of the world never before surveyed by the United States.

RIP 70, *A Finding Aid to Audiovisual Records in the National Archives of the United States Relating to World War II*, provides an excellent overview of still pictures, sound recordings, and motion picture films found within NARA's holdings by record group. RIP 70 may be accessed online at www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/70/index.html.

RIP 79, *World War II Records in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives*, provides detailed information on the varied holdings of aerial photographs, architectural drawings, charts, engineering plans, maps, and ship plans found within NARA. RIP 79 may be accessed online at www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/79/index.pdf.

The majority of special media records pertaining to the Second World War are located in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Presidential Libraries also have some audiovisual materials and artifacts pertaining to World War II.

Instructions on how to search for selected special media items through NARA's Archival Research Catalog (ARC) may be found at [www.archives.gov/research/ww2/finding-aids.html#](http://www.archives.gov/research/ww2/finding-aids.html#special-media)

special-media. Selected digital images may be downloaded via ARC.

