Military Service Records

Military service can be an important part of your family's story.

HAVE YOU HEARD?

★ **HAVE YOU HEARD** stories about a Revolutionary War or Civil War soldier in your family, but lack documents about him?

★ Or maybe you don't have stories, but you wonder about your military heritage.

★ **Military service can be an important part of your family's story.**

★ How do you determine whether an ancestor served in an 18th- or 19th- century war, if any records of his service exist, and where to find them?

Military Service Records

★ Fortunately, the US government realized long ago that it needed a way to keep track of an individual's service especially when it came time to pay veterans benefits.

★ The resulting **Compiled Military Service Records**, or **CMSR**s, offer a window of opportunity to genealogists looking for information about men who served in wars prior to 1902.

Military Service Records

★ This presentation will explain what information you might find in a CMSR and how to get copies.

★ Our examples and handy worksheet will keep your search organized and help you interpret what you find.

★ We'll also look at ways to use this new evidence to probe into other records and resources.

What is a CMSR?

★ A CMSR is an envelope (called a jacket) containing a set of cards that provide an overview of an individual's service in a military company. The jacket is labeled with the soldier's name, rank, military unit and a list of card numbers.

★ The information on each card was taken from some type of original record in which the soldier's name appears, such as an enlistment book, muster roll, hospital roll, descriptive book, prison record, payment voucher or discharge.

★ Some CMSRs, especially those of officers, also may contain personal papers.

What is a CMSR?

★ In the aftermath of the Civil War, clerks of the War Department Record and Pension Office painstakingly copied information from original records onto the cards to expedite the processing of pension claims.

★ Rather than sift through more than 500,000 rolls and books to verify a man's service, pension officials could now find what they needed in minutes.

★ Family historians reap the same benefits today.

What is a CMSR?

- ★ Once the Pension Office completed Union Civil War CMSRs, clerks did the same thing for men who'd served in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, 19th-century Indian wars and Mexican-American War.
- ★ Service records for Confederate soldiers, the Spanish-American War, and the Philippine Insurrection were created a bit later.
- ★ By the time the CMSR record-keeping system was discontinued before World War I, clerks had created about 58 million cards.

What is a CMSR?

- ★ This massive collection primarily covers those who served in volunteer military units, which were typically raised at the local or state level in times of war.
- ★ During the Civil War, these units included men who were drafted as well as those who enlisted voluntarily.
- ★ With the exception of the Revolutionary War, few CMSRs exist for men who served in the regular Army (career soldiers).
- ★ All these pre-WWI service records are now held at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) www.archive.gov in Washington, D.C.

What is a CMSR?

- ★ How trustworthy are these records, many of which were created long after the wars were over?
- ★ CMSRs are derivative sources, as they were transcribed from original rolls or books.
- ★ But their information is highly reliable, because accuracy was vital to the government. Clerks took great care with the transcriptions, and the original rolls rarely contain any more details about a soldier than what you'll find on CMSR cards.

Clues in a CMSR!

- ★ The number and type of cards included in a CMSR varies from war to war and soldier to soldier.
- ★ Civil War and later folders tend to be more robust than those from earlier wars.
- ★ If your ancestor re-enlisted or served in two different companies during a war, he'll probably have two separate CMSRs.
- ★ You surely ought to notice the soldier's rank and military unit.

Clues in a CMSR!

- ★ In addition you might discover some or all of the following in a CMSR:
- ★ Date and place he enlisted
- ★ Age at enlistment
- ★ Place of birth
- ★ Physical description
- ★ Occupation
- ★ Term of enlistment

Clues in a CMSR!

- ★ You might also discover some or all of the following in a CMSR:
- ★ Date and location he mustered into (joined) the unit
- ★ Name of his commanding officer
- ★ His presence at regular musters
- ★ Notations about illness, wounds, or desertion
- ★ You might find he stayed in a field hospital due to illness, or learn when he was wounded.
- ★ Date he mustered out (left) the company or died

Clues in a CMSR!

- ★ If a man was captured by the enemy, deserted or died while in service, his file should have a reference to it.
- ★ Any personal papers (documents that pertain to only one individual) tucked into the jacket will give you even more details.
- ★ While service records don't generally name a soldier's parents, you may find hints to help in your search for their identities.

Clues in a CMSR!

- ★ One note about age: A man's age when he enlisted remained his age in military records created throughout his term of enlistment.
- ★ This gets confusing when you see someone was 23 years old when he joined up, and was still 23 when he was discharged two or three years later.
- ★ Using a consistent age gave the army another means of identifying a particular man - a tactic you can use to your advantage as well. Many soldiers had identical or similar names.

Finding CMSRs

- ★ Depending on the war, your soldier's CMSR may be on microfilm and/ or digitized online at Fold3.com which is readily available at local Family History Centers.
- ★ If your soldier's CMSR is not online, you'll need to look up the name in a service records index, then find the record on microfilm or order a copy from NARA (we'll tell you how in a few minutes).

Finding CMSRs

- ★ **I'll explore individually each of the following:**
- ★ **Revolutionary War (1775-1783)**
- ★ **War of 1812 (1812-1815)**
- ★ **Indian Wars And Mexican-American War (1816-1858)**
- ★ **Civil War (1861-1865)**
- ★ **Spanish-American and Philippine Wars (1898-1902)**

Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

- ★ There's good and bad news for researchers hunting for ancestors who served in this war. A century after the war ended, service records were compiled for men who served in the Continental Army, various state and local militia units, and the American naval forces.
- ★ The bad news is that many records were destroyed when the British burned Washington, D.C., in 1814, and others deteriorated or were lost over the years, so not every man who served has a CMSR. The good news is that all the surviving records have been indexed, microfilmed, and digitized.

Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

- ★ You can search the complete collection of Revolutionary War Service Records on www.Fold3.com. This database contains actual images of soldiers' service record jackets and cards, digitized from NARA microfilm publication M88l. Revolutionary War Service Records-Navy, from NARA M880, provides the same access to sailors.
- ★ For best results, be flexible with name spellings, and try using an asterisk (*) to substitute for one or more letters in question.
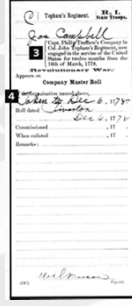
Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

* **The jacket of Joseph Campbell's CMSR identifies the unit he served in and his rank of private when he entered and left.**
* **1. The card numbers aren't significant, but do indicate nine cards are inside.**
* **2. No personal papers are in this file. Files of officers are more likely to contain additional papers, such as enlistment forms or casualty reports.**

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Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

* **This muster roll card shows the company formed March 16, 1778, and the term of service was 12 months.**
* **3. We might learn more about Joseph's experiences by researching his officers.**
* **4. Joseph was present at the muster roll taken Dec. 6, 1778, in Tiverton, RI.**
* **Researching place names can also shed light on wartime events**

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Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

* **CITATION FOR THIS RECORD:**
"Revolutionary War Service Records," digital images, Fold3 (http://www.fold3.com: accessed 7 January 2017), compiled service record of Joseph Campbell, Pvt., Topham's Reg., Rhode Island; citing NARA microfilm publication M881. roll 874.

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WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

* During this war, many men enlisted in local or state militias for short stints (three to nine months), and some served in more than one company.
* The resulting CMSRs generally are thin, sometimes holding only a few cards.
* They're fascinating nonetheless.

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WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

* War of 1812 Pensions – are preserved and digitized, *https://go.fold3.com/1812pensions.php* [free] — an ongoing project to digitize all War of 1812 Pension Records (7.2 million pages) which is being funded by individual and organizational (L-AGS.org) donations matched dollar for dollar by Ancestry.com.
* These records are housed on Fold3.com.
* Other partners are FGS and NARA.

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WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

* Get started with the full INDEX to War of 1812 service records, derived from NARA microfilm number M602, on Ancestry.com. To get to this or any other specific collection, go to the Card Catalog <search.ancestry.com/search/cardcatalog.aspx> and type the main words of the collection title into the keyword search box. Once you're in the database, enter your ancestor's name to learn his rank, company or regiment, and "roll box" where the CMSR is located at the National Archives. This war's CMSRs are in the process of being digitized. Use the information from the index to order a copy of your ancestor's file from NARA.

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WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

- ★ Also the full INDEX to War of 1812 service records is at: www.familysearch.org. Specifically: familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_War_of_1812_Pension_Records#Pension_Records.
- ★ And further specifically: familysearch.org/search/collection/1834325.
- ★ The INDEX may also lead you to the pension files on Fold3.com
- ★ Search the Internet for a particular state or county + "War of 1812" or just on the "War of 1812" to see what you can find.

WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

★ War of 1812 Pension Application Files Index, 1812-1815

Soldier:	Henry Hart Junior
Widow:	Dorothy Stoller, Hart
Marriage Date:	2 Sep 1819
Date Enlisted:	7 Sep 1814
Date Discharged:	18 Oct 1814
Soldier's Death Date:	11 Nov 1863
Soldier's Death Place:	Perth NY
Military Service Location:	New York
Pension Number - #1:	WO 20378
Pension Number - #2:	WC 17423
Bounty Land Number - #1:	99504 40 50
Bounty Land Number - #2:	21937 160 55
Roll number:	42
Archive Publication Number:	M313

WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

- ★ War of 1812 Pension Application Files Index, 1812-1815
- ★ Pension Number - #1: WO 20378
- ★ Pension Number - #2: WC 17423
- ★ Bounty Land Number - #1: 99504 40 50
- ★ Bounty Land Number - #2: 21937 160 55
- ★ These files provided over 30 documents.

WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)

- ★ Those files provided over 30 documents.
- ★ The soldier received a Bounty Land Warrant, dated 2 May 1854, which was never exercised.
- ★ The widow's meager pension was approved on 24 January 1879 for 8 dollars per month (approximately $185 per month in 2017).
- ★ A 'Secondary Proof of Marriage' document in the file listed the names and ages in 1879 of their 8 children whereas the 1850 census listed only 7 of the children. One had, probably, married.
- ★ Other documents included the signatures of the soldier and his widow.

INDIAN WARS AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR (1816-1858)

- ★ Volunteer armies were raised for the Florida Seminole Wars, Black Hawk War, Creek Wars and other conflicts. Fold3.com has digitized the INDEX to service records for these military engagements (from NARA M694), as the Indian Wars Service Record INDEX.
- ★ To find it, select Mexican American and Early Indian Wars on the Fold3.com home page, click the Browse All link and select the INDEX from the database list.

INDIAN WARS AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR (1816-1858)

- ★ Fold3.com has digitized the Mexican War Service Record INDEX, from NARA M616.
- ★ The Ancestry.com database, Compiled Military Service Records for American Volunteer Soldiers, Mexican War, 1845-1848, is another version of this same INDEX.
- ★ In addition, Fold3.com has the full CMSRs for **Arkansas**, **Mississippi**, **Pennsylvania**, **Tennessee**, **Texas** and the **Mormon Battalion** in its collection of Mexican War Service Records.
- ★ If your relative served from another state, you'll need to request his record from NARA. Later I'll present "How to Request from NARA."

CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

★ Civil War service files generally contain more information than those from earlier wars.
★ You might see a long list of numbers on your ancestor's file jacket.
★ Those numbers don't mean anything in research terms, but do indicate there's a lot of good stuff inside.

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CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

★ Types of cards you'll commonly find include:
★ Company descriptive book gives enlistment information; color of eyes, hair and complexion; birthplace and occupation.
★ Company muster-in rolls identify rank, age, date and place of enlistment, term of enlistment, and date and place of mustering in.

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CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

★ More types of cards you'll commonly find include:
★ Company muster rolls tell whether the soldier was present for the period of time specified on the card (generally two months), along with any remarks.
★ Company muster-out roll identifies rank, age, date and place of the roll, date of mustering out, date last paid, and balances owed or due for clothing, equipment and bounties.
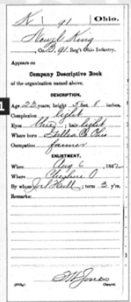
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CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

★ Less common types of cards you may find include:
★ Depending on the soldier's experiences, you also could find cards regarding hospitalization, special returns, desertion or other events.
★ Some files contain additional papers, such as enlistment forms or casualty reports.
★ The cards inside the jacket usually are not in any particular order.

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CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

★ **The Company Descriptive Book shows Newel was 23 when he enlisted Aug. 6, 1862.**
★ **This gives an approximate birth year of 1839.**
★ **The card also states his place of birth: Gallia County, Ohio.**
★ **These clues could lead to his parents' names.**
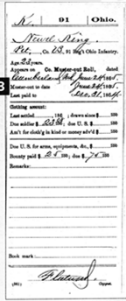
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CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

★ **The jacket contains several company muster roll cards.**
★ **This one, for September and October 1864, reports Newel was absent from the company because he'd been hospitalized at Gallipolis, Ohio for illness since June 10.**
★ **If he later applied for a pension file, it might provide more details.**

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CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

- ★ **The company muster-out roll shows Newel was discharged June 24, 1865, in Cumberland, Md.**
- ★ **Note that his age was still 23 years. The military used the same age throughout a man's term of service as a means of identification.**
- ★ **TIP: look for a company raised in the county where your ancestor lived in the 1860 census to help you**

CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

- ★ Union Civil War CMSRs are indexed by state, and the files for more than 20 states have been microfilmed and / or digitized.
- ★ On one January 1861 32 States in the Union. South Carolina had already gone out while Kansas had yet to enter the Union.
- ★ On One January 1862 11 States had left the Union but Kansas has joined the Union so we had 22 States.
- ★ On One January 1863 it was still 22 States.
- ★ On One January 1864 West Virginia had entered the Union so there was 23 States in the Union.
- ★ On One January 1865 after Nevada entered the Union there were 24 States in the Union.
- ★ All available Confederate CMSRs have been digitized. Availability depended on those 11 state's preservation priorities.
- ★ Whether your ancestor hailed from the North or the South, start with Fold3.com. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click the link for Confederate or Union service records.
- ★ Select Browse and choose the state where your relative lived at enlistment. Enter the name in the search box, using a middle initial if necessary to narrow the results. If the file is digitized, you'll be able to download it. If only the index card in available, order the file from the National Archives.

SPANISH-AMERICAN AND PHILIPPINE WARS (1898-1902)

- ★ Service records for men in these two brief conflicts were created similarly to Civil War CMSRs. A card index for men who served in the Spanish-American War in 1898 is on microfilm (NARA M87I) and online. You'll find it at FamilySearch as the United States Index to Service Records, War with Spain, 1898.
- ★ Unless your ancestor hailed from Florida, you'll need to order a copy of his file from NARA. Digital images of Florida Spanish American War CMSRs are on Fold3.com.

SPANISH-AMERICAN AND PHILIPPINE WARS (1898-1902)

- ★ The Philippine Insurrection developed in the wake of the Spanish-American War and lasted until 1902. The index to these service records, NARA M872, is not available online, nor are the records themselves.
- ★ If you think your ancestor served in the Philippines, consider making a trip to the National Archives or hiring a professional researcher.

Ordering a CMSR

- ★ NARA has an online order form you can use to request a copy of your ancestor's CMSR from any of the wars listed here. Go to archives.gov/forms and scroll down to (Pre-WWI) Military Service Records (NATF Form 86). Select whether you want to order online or mail in the form. There is a nominal fee and you can choose to receive the file electronically as a PDF emailed to you, or in print via postal mail.
- ★ Follow these steps to order online:
- ★ Create a NARA account, or log in if you already have one
- ★ Enter the veteran's name (birth and death dates are optional)
- ★ For Kind of Service, select Volunteer
- ★ Select the war he served in
- ★ Select the state he served from
- ★ If you know his company or regiment, indicate it
- ★ If NARA is successful in locating the records you requested, your credit card will be charged when the order is shipped.
- ★ No charge for unsuccessful searches.

Ordering a CMSR

- ★ Expect your file to take two to three months to arrive.
- ★ If you don't want to wait that long, you have a complex request, or you don't know exactly which file you need, consider hiring a professional genealogist in the Washington, D.C., area. He or she may be able to get records faster or determine which of two George Smiths is your ancestor.
- ★ Then again, perhaps you want to visit NARA to retrieve your ancestor's file in person.

Using CMSRs and Indexes

- ★ Indexes to service records often show more than one man of the same name from the same state. If the name is common, it can be a challenge to determine which one is your ancestor.
- ★ It might be helpful to first identify the veteran in military pension records, which also name wives or other family members.
- ★ The pension record will show the man's military unit, making it easy to spot his service record. Keep in mind, though, that not every man who served (or his widow) went on to receive a pension.

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Using CMSRs and Indexes

- ★ Compare details in a service record index with your other genealogical information. Does his age in the CMSR correspond with his age in censuses? What about *his* location?
- ★ Men typically joined units that formed close to home, often with neighbors. To find the names of units raised in a county, check local histories and consolidated state lists, such as the
- ★ *Official Roster of the Soldiers of the State of Ohio in the War of the Rebellion,* 1861-1865 (online at ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records).
- ★ A web search on the company name or number also can help you find out where its members lived.

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Using CMSRs and Indexes

- ★ Once you've obtained the right CMSR, squeeze every detail out of it.
- ★ Begin by sorting the cards in rough chronological order:
- ★ first the muster-in roll and descriptive book cards,
- ★ then the muster cards in order,
- ★ followed by the muster-out card.
- ★ Transcribe the information into a word document or spreadsheet to get an overview of your soldier's service.

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Using CMSRs and Indexes

- ★ Look for clues this process reveals. You may now know his place of birth. Use his age and date of enlistment to estimate a birth year.
- ★ With these hints, look for census, church, probate and land records for that surname- which just might lead to his parents' names.
- ★ If others in the company have the same last name, investigate them as possible relatives.

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Using CMSRs and Indexes

- ★ You may also want to delve deeper into your ancestor's wartime experiences and the battles he fought in. Look for a history of the regiment or company on sites such as **archive.org/details/texts**, **books.google.com** or **hathitrust.org**. Use **worldcat.org** to find books in libraries.
- ★ Perhaps you've discovered he was wounded, fell sick or was captured. With the date of the incident, you can determine the battle or skirmish it corresponds to. You might even find the name of a hospital or prison camp you can research.

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Using CMSRs and Indexes

- ★ In addition to pension files, other military records can help you piece together your ancestor's story. These include cards and papers that, for one reason or another, weren't filed with his CMSR. An entry in the bookmark section of the CMSR jacket is a good indication more documents exist.
- ★ Finding them at NARA can take some expertise, but select records for a few states have been microfilmed. For an overview of military records available for each state, see **familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_ Military_Records**.

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MILITARY SERVICE RECORDS WORKSHEET

Use this form to organize information that can help you in your search for an ancestor's military service record. If you're not sure of a detail, leave it blank or provide your best guess(es) based on research you've done. Update the information as you uncover new records.

Ancestor Information

Full name _____

Birth date/approximate year _____

Birthplace_____

Approximate age at time the war began _____

State(s) and county(ies) where he resided before and during the war _____

_____

Occupation _____

Date and place of death _____

Military Service Information

War in which ancestor might have served _____

If Civil War, Union or Confederate side?_____

Branch of service, if known (circle): US Army   US Navy   colonial militia   state militia   other

Rank, if known: _____

What indications of service have been found? (Check all that apply)

☐ family history or lore   ☐ 1890 veterans census   ☐ county history

☐ online index   ☐ draft registration (Civil War)   ☐ online family tree

☐ published roster   ☐ lineage society database   ☐ other _____

☐ bounty land record   ☐ gravestone marker

☐ pension record   ☐ soldier's home records

Compiled Military Service Record Tracker

Database Searched	Website or Film#	Date Searched	Results