

Civil War Records What Is a Reasonably Exhaustive Search?

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Wars by their nature create paper; an enormous volume of paper. The Civil War was no exception. Fortunately, many of the records from this time period exist, many in the National Archives of the United States and other state and local depositories. These records help to document American history for that period. These records include enlistment papers, muster rolls, payrolls, rosters, descriptive lists, account books, oaths of allegiance, discharge papers, and pensions among others. These records may provide names, ranks, dates, organizations, locations, and remarks concerning hospitalizations, promotions, wounds, dates of death, and physical descriptions.

We need to understand –

- The War
- The Organizations
- The Records

Identify a Soldier

Focus on those born between 1835 and 1845

Knowledge of the person before you start military research

- Full Name
- Year of Birth
- Place of Birth
- Residence before, during, and after conflict
- Name of Spouse
- Name of at least one child

Complete all of the Census research

Find the Burial

Find the Unit

First Steps

- Family Sources
- Soldiers and Sailors Database
[<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>]
- Pension Research [if Union]
- Compiled Military Service Records

Military Service Records at the National Archives

<https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/ref-info-papers/rip109.pdf>

Pension Research [if Confederate]

State and Local Depositories and Histories

Library of Congress - <https://guides.loc.gov/civil-war-regimental-histories/digital-resources>

Unit History

Letters and Diaries

Record Search

Ancestry

Find A Grave

Fold3

Family Search

Organization of Units

Army

Corps

Division

Brigade

Regiment

Company

Knowledge of the Types of Units

Home Guard

Militia

Independent Companies

State Units

Volunteer Regiments

Units raised by the Federal or Confederate Government

Sailor or Marine

Knowledge of the Rank

Officer

Line

Staff: Surgeon, Engineers, Chaplains, Ordnance

Enlisted

Hospital Stewards, Ordnance Sergeants, Commissary Sergeants

Other

Literature Search

Google

Google Books

State Historical Society

WorldCat.org
Amazon
Ebay

Knowledge of Other Facts

Captains
Colonels & Generals
Battles
Survivor
Prisoner

Pension Research

Pension Law
Pension Application Files
Pension Office Ledgers
Final Pension Payment
Pension Office Correspondence

Pension Indexes

General Index (Ancestry.com)
Organizational Index (Fold3.com)
Numerical Index (both)

Order Union pensions from the National Archives
Widow's Pensions (some on Fold3)

Compiled Military Service Records

<https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/ref-info-papers/rip109.pdf>

www.Archives.gov

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war> is a good place to start.

Union

Some Compiled Military Service Records on Fold3
Union Units in the Confederate States
Galvanized Yankees
Border States
Small population northern states

Other kinds of material

Prisoner of War

Ancestry has selected Confederate POW records

Enlistment Papers

Casualty Sheets

Discharge Certificates

Final Statements 1862 – 1899 [Union on Fold3]

Carded Medical Records

Confederate carded medical records are with CMSRs

The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion

Available from National Institute of Health

Courts-Martial Case Files 1808-1939 [Union] [Confederate not extant]

Provost Marshal Records are located in NARA regional archives

You may have to look in multiple places for records. For example:

Enlistment Records are found in three places

CMSR

Enlistment Papers in RG 94, entry 91, Enlistment Paper, 1798-1912

Personal Papers in RG 94, entry 94, Personal Papers, 1812-1912

Unit History

Diaries and Letters

Pension Office Correspondence (Ancestry Index Cards)

State Adjutant General's Office

Official Records of the Union & Confederate Armies

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