

PLAIN-LANGUAGE GUIDE

Written for families, not archivists.

Finding Your WWII Veteran's Service Records

A step-by-step guide to getting your father's, mother's, or grandparent's World War II military file from the National Archives, plus how to let The National WWII Museum do the work for you.

What this guide does

Takes the official 36-page National WWII Museum research guide and turns it into numbered steps you can follow one at a time.

Every web address is **clickable** if you are reading this on a computer, tablet, or phone. The full address is also printed out so it still works on paper.

Phone numbers, mailing addresses, and costs are printed in **bold** so they are easy to find.

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What's in this guide

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Good news before you start

Every World War II veteran's file is now open to the public. Records become public 62 years after the veteran left the service. All WWII service ended more than 62 years ago, so **you do not need to be a relative** to request a WWII veteran's file.

It is free to ask. You only pay if the Archives finds the file and you want a copy (usually \$25 or \$70).

How to use this guide

1. Read Part 1 and pick Path A or Path B.
2. Fill in the worksheet in Part 2. Keep it next to you.
3. Follow the numbered steps for your path. Do one step, check it off, then do the next.
4. When you get stuck, go to Part 12 (Common questions) or call the number in Part 10.

You do **not** need to read Parts 7 and 8 unless you want more than the basic file.

Part 1: Pick your path

There are two very different reasons people request a veteran's records. Which one is you?

Your situation	What that means
PATH A I need proof of service right now for a benefit, a VA claim, medical care, or a military funeral.	You want just one document : the DD-214 (the discharge paper). It is free , usually arrives in about 2 weeks , and urgent funeral requests are often filled in 2 days . Only the veteran or the next-of-kin can use this path. Go to Part 3.
PATH B I want to learn the whole story: where they served, their unit, awards, training, wounds, and so on.	You want the full file (called the OMPF). Anyone can request it for a WWII veteran. It costs \$25 or \$70 if found, and takes weeks to months . Go to Part 4.

Who counts as "next-of-kin"?

The National Archives says next-of-kin means the veteran's **un-remarried widow or widower, son, daughter, father, mother, brother, or sister**.

Grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins are **not** next-of-kin for records requests. That is fine: for a WWII veteran you can still get the full file using Path B.

Important: do not mix the two paths

If you need the DD-214 quickly, ask for **only the DD-214**. If you ask for the full file at the same time, the Archives will **not** treat it as urgent and you may wait months.

You can always come back later and do Path B for the full file.

Part 2: Gather your information

Write down everything you know about the veteran on this page. You will copy these details onto the request. **The more you have, the better**, but you can still send a request with only a name and a branch of service.

Must have (minimum)

Full name used during service:

(Women: include maiden name)

Branch of service (Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Army Air Forces):

Very helpful

Service number ("serial number", found on dog tags and discharge papers):

Social Security number (if known):

Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: _____

Years of service (a rough range is fine, e.g. 1943 to 1946):

Date of death (required if the veteran has died):

Helpful if the file may have burned in the 1973 fire (Army and Army Air Forces)

Where they enlisted or entered service:

Last unit they were assigned to:

Place of discharge:

Where to look for these details

Old discharge papers, dog tags, letters home, photographs with writing on the back, obituaries, family Bibles, the funeral home that handled the veteran's service, and the county courthouse (veterans were encouraged to file a copy of their discharge there).

Ask other relatives. One phone call to an aunt or cousin can fill in half this page.

Part 3: Path A. Get a DD-214 for benefits or a funeral

Use this path only if you are the **veteran** or the **next-of-kin** and you need proof of service. It is free. The fastest way is online.

STEP 1 Go to the online request site (eVetRecs)

On a computer, tablet, or phone, open this address:

<https://vetrecs.archives.gov/>

If that address gives you trouble, go to the main page and click the **“Start Request Online”** button:

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>

STEP 2 Answer the questions on the screen

The site asks who you are (veteran or next-of-kin), then asks for the veteran's details from your Part 2 worksheet.

When it asks what you want, choose **DD Form 214 or equivalent ONLY**. Do not check the box for the full file.

If the veteran has died, you will need to give the **date of death** and be ready to send proof of death (a death certificate, an obituary, or a letter from the funeral home).

STEP 3 If it is urgent, say so in the Comments box

For a funeral or a medical deadline, type the deadline in the **Comments** section. For example: *“URGENT. Funeral is on October 3 at 10 a.m. at Smith Funeral Home, phone 555-123-4567.”*

The Archives tries to fill urgent requests within **2 business days**.

STEP 4 Print, sign, and send the signature page

The website is not finished until you sign. At the end it gives you a **signature page**. Print it, sign it, and either:

Fax it to 314-801-0764, or

Mail it to: **National Personnel Records Center, (Military Personnel Records),
1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138**

For a funeral, fax is much faster. Include the funeral date and time, the funeral home's phone number, and the proof of death.

STEP 5 Save your request number

You will get an email with a **request number**. Write it here:

You can check on the request 10 business days later (see Part 5).

No computer? Do it on paper instead

Print the **SF-180** form (a friend, a library, or a VA office can print it for you):

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html>

Fill in Section I (the veteran), check **DD Form 214** in Section II, write your deadline in the **Purpose** box, and sign Section III. Then fax it to **314-801-0764** or mail it to the St. Louis address above. See Part 4, Step 3 for line-by-line help.

Planning a burial in a VA National Cemetery?

Call the **National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117** or visit:

https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/burial_benefits/

The Archives will also help the funeral home arrange military funeral honors.

Part 4: Path B. Get the full service file (OMPF)

The full file is called the **Official Military Personnel File**, or **OMPF**. It can include enlistment papers, units and ships, training, qualifications, awards, promotions, discipline, wounds, and the discharge. Army and Army Air Forces files may also hold medical and dental records. Navy and Marine files do **not** (see Part 7 for those).

Because every WWII veteran left service more than 62 years ago, **anyone** may request the file. You send a one-page paper form called the **SF-180**.

STEP 1 Print the SF-180 form

Open this page and click the link to download the form:

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html>

Print it. It is about 3 pages: page 1 is the form, the rest are instructions.

Prefer not to use the form? A plain **letter** works too. See the box at the end of this Part.

STEP 2 Fill in Section I (who the veteran is)

Copy from your Part 2 worksheet. Print clearly in ink.

1. Name used during service: Last name, first name, full middle name.

2. Social Security number: If you do not know it, write “unknown”.

3 and 4. Date and place of birth.

5. Service: On the “Active” line write the branch (for example “US Navy”), the year they went in, the year they got out, check Officer or Enlisted, and the service number (or “unknown”).

STEP 2 Fill in Section I (who the veteran is)

6. Is this person deceased? Check Yes and give the date of death if you know it.

7. Did this person retire from the military? Usually No for WWII veterans.

STEP 3 Fill in Section II (what you want)

Do **not** check the DD-214 box. That gets you only one page.

Check the **“Other (Specify)”** box and write: **“Complete copy of the full OMPF”**.

Under **Purpose**, check **Genealogy** (or Personal) and briefly explain, for example: *“Family history research on my grandfather.”*

If you think the file may have burned in 1973 (Army or Army Air Forces), add: *“If the record was lost in the 1973 fire, please reconstruct from alternate sources.”*

STEP 4 Fill in Section III (you)

1. Requester name: your name.

2. Who you are: If you are the veteran, check that box. If you are next-of-kin, check that box and attach proof of death. If you are a grandchild, niece, cousin, or not related, check **Other** and write your relationship (for example “grandson” or “researcher”).

3. Send documents to: your full mailing address, daytime phone, and email.

4. Sign and date. A signature is not strictly required for these old public records, but sign anyway. It avoids delays.

STEP 5 **Send it in**

Fax: 314-801-9195

or Mail: National Personnel Records Center, (Military Personnel Records), 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138

Do not send money. They will bill you only if the file is found.

Keep a photocopy or a picture of what you sent, and write down the date:

Writing a letter instead of using the form

A letter is fine. Put these things in it, in this order:

1. "I am requesting a complete copy of the full Official Military Personnel File (OMPF)."
2. Why: family history / genealogy.
3. Everything you know about the veteran (all the lines from Part 2).
4. Your name, mailing address, phone number, and email.
5. Your signature and the date.

Fax it to **314-801-9195** or mail it to the St. Louis address in Step 5.

Part 5: What happens after you send the request

STEP 1 Wait

DD-214 for benefits: about 2 weeks (2 days if urgent).

Full file: 10 days to 6 weeks is typical. If the file was damaged in the 1973 fire, it can take **several months** while staff piece it together.

The Archives now suggests waiting at least **90 days** before following up on a routine request.

STEP 2 Check the status online (after 10 business days)

Go to:

<https://www.archives.gov/forms/st-louis/mpr-followup.html>

Fill in the veteran's name and your details. You do not need the request number, but it helps if you have it.

Or call the Customer Service line: **314-801-0800**. Expect a long hold. Busiest times are weekdays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Central time.

STEP 3 You get a letter with a bill (full-file requests only)

When the file is found, the Archives mails you a letter with an **order form** showing the cost:

\$25 flat if the file is 5 pages or less.

\$70 flat if the file is 6 pages or more.

Mail the form back with a personal check, cashier's check, money order, or credit card number. The copy is sent after payment.

Photographs in a file are **not** copied by mail. They can only be reproduced if you visit St. Louis in person.

STEP 4 Read the file

Look for: units and ships, dates, ratings or qualifications, battles and campaigns, awards and citations, wounds. Those details are the keys that unlock Part 8 (unit research).

If the letter says the file was **lost in the fire**, go to Part 6.

Want someone to go get it for you?

You can hire a private researcher to visit St. Louis, find the file, and copy it. This is faster but costs more (hourly or flat fees). The Archives keeps a list; they do not endorse anyone on it:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/hire-help/topics.html?topic=military>

Or let The National WWII Museum handle the whole thing for a flat fee. See Part 9.

Part 6: The 1973 fire

On July 12, 1973, a fire at the St. Louis records center destroyed 16 to 18 million files. Read more from the Archives:

<https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/fire-1973>

Branch	What happened
Army and Army Air Forces (discharged 1912 to 1960)	About 80% destroyed . Many WWII Army files are gone or damaged.
Air Force (discharged 1947 to 1964)	About 75% destroyed .
Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard	Barely affected . Files are almost always there.

What to do if the file burned

- **Still send the request.** Staff will try to rebuild a record of service from other sources (pay records, hospital records, morning reports, and so on). Give them everything from your Part 2 worksheet, especially **where they enlisted**, the **last unit**, and the **place of discharge**.
- **Look for the discharge paper at home, at the county courthouse, or at the funeral home.** Many veterans recorded a copy at the courthouse where they lived after the war, and funeral homes keep copies to arrange military honors.
- **Search the free online enlistment database.** Army enlistment cards for 1938 to 1946 survived separately. Go to the Access to Archival Databases site, choose World War II, then “Army Serial Number Enlistment Records”:
- <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/>
- **Research the unit instead.** Even without a personal file, unit records tell you where they went and what they did. See Part 8.

Part 7: Other records you may want

Skip this Part unless one of these headings applies to you. Each one is a short recipe: who can ask, what to send, and where.

Replacing lost or never-issued medals

- **Who can ask:** the veteran or next-of-kin only. Anyone else must buy medals from a commercial dealer. For medals the Army defines next-of-kin as spouse, parent, eldest sibling, child, or grandchild. The Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard use parent, sibling, child, or un-remarried spouse.
- **Army Air Forces veterans:** apply to the **Air Force**, not the Army. Note the Air Force and Coast Guard do not accept next-of-kin requests for veterans who left before 1954.
- **Cost:** usually free for WWII veterans.
- **How:** file online through eVetRecs (Part 3, Step 1) or write to the NPRC, 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138. The NPRC forwards it to the branch, which sends the medals.
- **Coast Guard veterans** write instead to: Coast Guard Personnel Service Center, 4200 Wilson Blvd, Suite 900 (PSC-PSD-MA), Stop 7200, Arlington, VA 20598-7200.
- Details by branch: <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/replace-medals.html>

Medical records (Navy and Marine Corps)

- Navy and Marine files do not contain medical records. Those were filed by the **hospital**, so you must know the **hospital name** and the **month and year** of treatment.
- **Who can ask:** the veteran, or next-of-kin with proof of death. Others need the veteran's signed, dated written permission.
- **How:** a letter or an SF-180 with "Medical Records" checked, plus the veteran's name and service or Social Security number. Fax **314-801-9195** or mail to the NPRC St. Louis address.
- **Cost:** free to ask; copy fees vary and you are told before you pay.

Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF)

- Created when a service member **died on active duty**. Covers the death, burial or return of remains, and personal effects. Can include next-of-kin letters and family records.
- **How:** email **STL.Archives@nara.gov** or mail to National Archives at St. Louis, PO Box 37587, St. Louis, MO 63138. Say you want the **IDPF** and give the name, branch, date of death, and unit, base, or ship.
- Army IDPFs are still being transferred to St. Louis; you will be told if it is available yet.

Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR)

- Filed when an Army Air Forces plane was shot down or lost. Names the crew and describes the loss. About 30% of losses were never documented.
- Search and order here:
<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/missing-air-crew-reports.html>
- Many are also on the subscription site Fold3 (Part 8).

Naval Aviation Training Jackets (Navy and Marine pilots, 1914 to 1946)

- A record of flight training, with fitness reports and often **photographs**.
- **How:** email **stl.archives@nara.gov**, fax **314-801-9187**, or mail to National Archives & Records Administration, Attn: Archival Programs, PO Box 38757, St. Louis, MO 63138. Say "Naval Aviation Training Jacket" and give the same details as an OMPF request.
- **Cost:** 80 cents a page (\$20 minimum); photos \$3.50 each, \$20 for an enhanced digital photo.

Prisoners of War (POW)

- Free online database of almost all American POWs. Go to the address below, choose **World War II**, then "**Records of World War II Prisoners of War**". A second file, "World War II Prisoners of the Japanese Data Files," covers POWs of Japan.
- <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/>

- Paper POW records are at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Email **Archives2reference@nara.gov** with the name, rank, service number, and the approximate date and place of capture.

Merchant Mariners

- Very little personal paperwork survives. The Coast Guard holds some seaman's papers and licenses.
- If you know the **ship**, you can request the ship's **logbook** from the regional Archives branch nearest the port where the ship arrived back in the United States. List of branches: <https://www.archives.gov/locations>
- Deaths: Record Group 26, "Deceased and War Casualty Seaman's Records, 1937 to 1950," at the Archives in Washington, DC. Email **Archives1reference@nara.gov**.

Federal civilian employees (war workers, shipyards, camp staff, and so on)

- Civilians who worked for the government may have an **Official Personnel File (OPF)** in St. Louis. Public if they left federal service **before 1952**; otherwise only the person or next-of-kin may ask.
- **How:** mail a letter saying you want the **OPF** and why, with the name used at work, date of birth, Social Security number, dates of service, and the agency and its location. Send to: National Archives & Records Administration, ATTN: Archival Programs, PO Box 38757, St. Louis, MO 63138.
- **Cost:** \$25 (5 pages or less) or \$70 (6 pages or more). Whole file only.
- **Private companies** (for example Higgins Industries) are **not** in the Archives. Ask the company if it still exists; many records were thrown away.

Japanese American internees

- Free online database of over 100,000 War Relocation Authority records. Go to the address below, choose World War II, then "**Records About Japanese Americans Relocated During World War II**": <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/>
- Not there? Try the Justice Department internee index cards: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/720246>

- Overview of everything available:
<https://www.archives.gov/research/japanese-americans/internment-intro.html>
- Hundreds of oral histories: <https://densho.org/>

Red Cross nurses and Cadet Nurse Corps

- **Red Cross Historical Nurse Files** (not digitized): email **Archives2reference@nara.gov** or write to National Archives at College Park, Textual Reference (RDT2), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001.
- **US Cadet Nurse Corps** membership cards (Record Group 90): you need the nursing school's name and city. The cards are also searchable by name on Ancestry.com (subscription).

Famous people (“Persons of Exceptional Prominence”)

- Files of presidents, generals, and celebrities are handled separately. Many are digitized. Paper copies are 80 cents a page; digital copies \$20 to \$250.
- Call **314-801-0847** or email **pep.records@nara.gov**. List of names: <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/persons-of-prominence.html>

Part 8: Beyond the file. Researching the unit or ship

Once you know the **unit** (for the Army or Marines) or the **ship** (for the Navy or Coast Guard), you can find out where they went and what happened day by day. These records rarely name individuals, but they tell the story your veteran lived.

Record	What it tells you
Action reports (after-action reports)	Written by officers after a fight with the enemy. Army and Marine units often have monthly ones; Navy ships have them for specific events.
Deck logs	A ship's daily diary: where it was each day, engagements, notable events. Navy and Coast Guard ships (not small landing craft).
War diaries	Daily summaries kept by Army units and Navy ships or squadrons, often with copies of orders and messages.
Muster rolls	Monthly lists of everyone attached to a Navy ship or base or a Marine unit. The best way to confirm your sailor or Marine was aboard. Online at Ancestry and Fold3.
Unit histories	Books the units printed after the war. Try libraries, used-book sites, and unit reunion association websites.

Step by step: getting a unit record from the National Archives

STEP 1 Search the online catalog

<https://www.archives.gov/research/catalog/>

Type your search, for example *"47th Infantry Regiment after action"* or *"USS Texas deck log 1944"*.

STEP 2 Write down three things from the item's page

The **Record Group** number, the **National Archives Identifier**, and the **Box number** (if shown). The page also shows which Archives location holds it and its email.

STEP 3 Email that location

Describe exactly what you want copied and include the three numbers. An archives technician will reply, quote the cost, and arrange delivery. Cost and time vary by location and file size.

Washington, DC records: **Archives1reference@nara.gov**. College Park, MD records: **Archives2reference@nara.gov**.

Not sure where to start? Ask the Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/contact/>

Shortcut: the subscription websites

- **Fold3** (<https://www.fold3.com>): Missing Air Crew Reports, war diaries, action reports, and many official documents, already scanned and searchable by name. Often free to use at a public library.
- **Ancestry** (<https://www.ancestry.com>): enlistment records, muster rolls, draft cards, Cadet Nurse cards. Many libraries offer free in-library access.

Free official history sites

- The National WWII Museum digital collections (photos and oral histories): <https://www.ww2online.org>
- Naval History and Heritage Command: <https://www.history.navy.mil/>
- US Army Center of Military History: <https://history.army.mil/>
- Marine Corps History Division: <https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/History-Division/>
- Air Force Historical Research Agency: <https://www.dafhistory.af.mil/>
- Coast Guard Historian's Office (unit histories, casualty lists): <https://www.history.uscg.mil/>

- US Merchant Marine Academy history:
<https://www.usmma.edu/about/usmma-history>
- Library of Congress Veterans History Project (oral histories):
<https://www.loc.gov/vets/>
- American Red Cross history:
<https://www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/history.html>

Do not overlook local sources

Local newspapers printed enlistment and casualty lists and “welcome home” stories. Ask the public library about microfilm or online newspaper archives.

County courthouses often hold a recorded copy of the discharge. Local VA offices, state archives, university libraries, and unit reunion groups can all have rosters and papers.

Part 9: Let the Museum do it. WWII Research Services

If the steps in this guide feel like too much, The National WWII Museum in New Orleans will request the file for you, search additional databases, and have a historian look it over. Here is what they offer, in plain terms.

What it is	The Museum's Historical Research Services obtains the veteran's Official Military Personnel File from the National Archives in St. Louis on your behalf.
Who it covers	WWII military veterans only. They do not research civilians or home-front workers.
What you get	The File Research Package : a copy of the veteran's file exactly as found in the Archives, plus searches of other databases for related records, plus a review by a Museum Research Historian.
Cost	\$150 plus tax (\$164.18 total). The fee is non-refundable , even if the file turns out to be small or was lost in the 1973 fire.
How long	Roughly a couple of months to receive the file. The Museum cannot control how fast the Archives pulls records, so this is an estimate.
Extra option	If the historian finds substantial material, the Museum will contact you about additional packages, including having a historian write a biographical book about the veteran. You do not get to review the book before it is printed, but a PDF copy is available after you receive the printed book. Not everything you send may end up in it.
What they need	The online Veteran Request Form (veteran details and purchaser details) and payment. Have your Part 2 worksheet handy; it asks for the same things.

STEP 1 **Read the service page**

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/wwii-research-services>

Read the Terms and Conditions before you pay:

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/research-veteran/terms-conditions>

STEP 2 **Fill out the Veteran Request Form and pay**

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/form/veteran-and-purchaser-information>

Enter the veteran's information and your own, then pay the File Research Package fee with a credit card.

STEP 3 **Wait for the Museum to contact you**

They will send the file when it arrives and will reach out if there is enough material for a biography package.

Questions: call the Museum at **504-528-1944** or email **info@nationalww2museum.org**. Address: 945 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA 70130.

Do it yourself or pay the Museum? A quick comparison

Do it yourself (Parts 3 to 5): \$0 to ask, \$25 or \$70 if found. You fill out one form. You do the reading and the follow-up.

Museum service (Part 9): \$164.18 flat. They fill out the forms, chase the Archives, search extra databases, and a historian reviews the result. Best if you are short on time, uncomfortable with paperwork, or want the option of a written biography.

Either way, the Archives file is the same file. Neither route can bring back a record that burned in 1973.

Part 10: Phone numbers and addresses

Phone numbers

Archives customer service (St. Louis)	314-801-0800 Long holds are normal. Avoid weekdays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Central.
VA National Cemetery scheduling	800-535-1117
The National WWII Museum	504-528-1944

Fax numbers (make sure you use the right one)

DD-214 for benefits or funeral (Path A) signature page	314-801-0764
Full file, medical records, SF-180 general requests (Path B)	314-801-9195
Naval Aviation Training Jackets	314-801-9187

Mailing addresses

Military personnel files (Paths A and B), medical records, medals	National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records) 1 Archives Drive St. Louis, MO 63138
Deceased personnel files (IDPF)	National Archives at St. Louis PO Box 37587 St. Louis, MO 63138 Email: STL.Archives@nara.gov

Civilian personnel files and Naval Aviation Training Jackets	National Archives & Records Administration Attn: Archival Programs PO Box 38757 St. Louis, MO 63138
Washington, DC records (merchant mariner deaths, etc.)	National Archives at Washington, DC, Textual Reference (RDT1) 7th and Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20408 Email: Archives1reference@nara.gov
College Park, MD records (POWs, Red Cross, unit records)	National Archives at College Park, Textual Reference (RDT2) 8601 Adelphi Road College Park, MD 20740-6001 Email: Archives2reference@nara.gov
Coast Guard medals	Coast Guard Personnel Service Center 4200 Wilson Blvd, Suite 900 (PSC-PSD-MA) Stop 7200 Arlington, VA 20598-7200
The National WWII Museum	945 Magazine Street New Orleans, LA 70130 Email: info@nationalww2museum.org

The web addresses you will use most

Request online (eVetRecs)	https://vetrecs.archives.gov/
SF-180 form	https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html
Check request status	https://www.archives.gov/forms/st-louis/mpr-followup.html
Free databases (POW, enlistment, internees)	https://aad.archives.gov/aad/
Museum research service	https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/wwii-research-services

Part 11: Words you will run into

NARA	National Archives and Records Administration. The government agency that keeps the records.
NPRC	National Personnel Records Center. The building in St. Louis where military and civilian personnel files live. Same address as the National Archives at St. Louis.
OMPF	Official Military Personnel File. The veteran's complete service file. What Path B gets you.
DD-214	The one-page discharge or separation document. Proof of service for benefits. What Path A gets you. (WWII-era papers may have other form names; ask for "DD-214 or equivalent.")
SF-180	Standard Form 180, "Request Pertaining to Military Records." The paper form for asking for records.
eVetRecs	The Archives' online request system at vetrecs.archives.gov . For veterans and next-of-kin.
Next-of-kin	Un-remarried widow or widower, son, daughter, father, mother, brother, or sister. (Medal requests use slightly different lists; see Part 7.)
Service number	The serial number given to every service member. On dog tags and every official paper. The single most useful thing you can have.
Archival record	A record old enough to be open to the public. For military files that is 62 years after leaving service. All WWII files qualify.
OPF	Official Personnel File for a federal civilian employee.
IDPF	Individual Deceased Personnel File. Created when someone died on active duty.
MACR	Missing Air Crew Report. Filed when an Army Air Forces plane was lost.

PEP	Persons of Exceptional Prominence. Files of famous people, handled separately.
AAD	Access to Archival Databases. The Archives' free online search for digitized lists (POWs, enlistments, internees).
Record Group	How the Archives organizes everything. A number that identifies which agency created a set of records.
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act. The law that decides what can be released. Some private details may be blacked out.
WAC, WAVES, SPARS, WASP	Women's services of the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Army Air Forces. Their files are requested exactly the same way; use the maiden name.

Part 12: Common questions and problems

Q: I only know his name. Can I still ask?

A: Yes, but you must also give the **branch of service**. Records are filed by branch, so without it the staff has nowhere to start. Common names have many matches; add a birth date or hometown if you can.

Q: I am a grandchild. Am I allowed to get the file?

A: Yes. Every WWII file is public now. Use Path B (SF-180). You are not next-of-kin, so you cannot use the free benefits path or request medals, but you can get the full file.

Q: The Archives says the record was destroyed in the fire. Is that the end?

A: No. See Part 6. Ask them to reconstruct from alternate sources, check the county courthouse and the funeral home for the discharge paper, search the free enlistment database, and research the unit (Part 8).

Q: It has been two months and I have heard nothing.

A: Check status online (Part 5, Step 2) or call 314-801-0800. The Archives asks for 90 days before you follow up on a routine request. Fire-damaged files can take several months.

Q: Do I send a check with the form?

A: No. Never send money with the request. You get a bill only if the file is found.

Q: They sent a bill for \$70. Is that right?

A: Yes, if the file is 6 pages or more. Files of 5 pages or less are \$25. Photographs are not included by mail.

Q: He was in the Army Air Corps. Which branch do I write?

A: For records: **Army** (the Army Air Forces were part of the Army). For **medals**: apply to the **Air Force**.

Q: She served as a WAVE / WAC / Army nurse. Any difference?

A: No difference in how you ask. Use the name she used **at the time** (usually her maiden name).

Q: Can I get his medical records?

A: Army and Army Air Forces: often inside the OMPF. Navy and Marines: separate request that needs the hospital name and date, and either the veteran's permission or proof of death from next-of-kin (Part 7).

Q: I do not have a fax machine or a computer.

A: Mail works for everything. Public libraries can print the SF-180, and many offer free fax service or cheap fax at a shipping store. Libraries also often have free Fold3 and Ancestry access.

Q: Is the Museum service worth \$164?

A: It depends on you. If you are comfortable filling out one form and waiting, doing it yourself costs at most \$70. If you want someone else to handle it and a historian to review it, the Museum package is a fair price. Neither can recover a burned file.

Q: Where can I read the original Museum guide?

A: The Museum offers its full 36-page guide, with sample filled-in SF-180s, through its research page:

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/wwii-research-services>

One last checklist before you mail anything

- ☐ Veteran's full name and branch of service are on the form.
- ☐ I asked for the right thing: DD-214 only (Path A) or full OMPF (Path B).
- ☐ My mailing address, phone, and email are on the form.
- ☐ I signed and dated it.
- ☐ Proof of death attached if the veteran has died and I am next-of-kin.
- ☐ I used the correct fax number or address (Part 10).
- ☐ I kept a copy and wrote down the date I sent it.
- ☐ No money enclosed.

This guide summarizes and reorganizes the free National WWII Museum publication *Researching American Military and Civilian Records from World War II* (written by historian Kali Martin for the Museum's Institute for the Study of War and Democracy) and the Museum's WWII Research Services web page. It is not affiliated with the Museum or the National Archives. Fees, addresses, and procedures change; confirm on the official websites before you send anything.