



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Awards Information Management System (AIMS) Files

Record Group 428

Updated May 21, 2020

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1. What information is in these records accessible through Access to Archival Databases (AAD)?

This series consists of data about Navy or Marine Corps awards approved by the Chief of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, or the Secretary of the Navy and entered into the Awards Information Management System (AIMS). The records in the Public Use History Data Files contain information associated with approved awards and decorations of honor given to individual military and civilian personnel and military units. The data for individual awards include the name of the recipient, grade, award recommended, award approved, and the date of approval. The data for unit awards include award recommended, award merit period, award approved, date of approval, and whether the award is for a ship or not.

The records in the Participating Commands Files contain information about the participating commands identified in the award records.

2. Is there a record for all Navy and Marine Corps awards in AIMS?

No. The Awards Information Management System (AIMS) Files only include records for awards approved by the Chief of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, or the Secretary of the Navy AND for which the agency entered information into AIMS. Use of AIMS began in July 1988.

3. What are the time periods covered in the AIMS records accessible through AAD?

These records contain multiple fields with date information:

- the dates of the award merit period
- the dates when the agency recommended, approved, and/or completed the award
- the dates the agency entered the information into the AIMS

The bulk of the records in AIMS are for unit and individual awards given for service (award merit period) during the Vietnam War through the 1990s. There are also some award records for service during World War II and the Korean War, along with other time periods. Keep in mind that the agency entered the information into AIMS starting in July 1988. It is possible that the agency approved the award or entered the information into AIMS many years after the award merit period. In some of the records, there are award merit periods or award approved dates that appear inconsistent with the information in the rest of that record and therefore may be inaccurate or incorrect. See also FAQ #9 “What are some of the limitations of these files?”

4. What versions of these records are available through AAD?

Two versions of these records are available through AAD. The agency transferred to NARA snapshots of AIMS records at various points in time.

The first version consists of AIMS records as transferred in August 1993:

- Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – c. 1992
- Participating Commands File, 11/9/1984 – 6/30/1989

NARA prepared this Public Use History Data File by creating an extract from the AIMS Individual Awards Active and History File as of August 1993. The extract consists of the fields designated by the agency as the History file type, which are associated with approved awards. Also, the characters in the Social Security Number field are masked.

The second version consists of AIMS records as transferred in May 2004:

- Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – 12/31/1994
- Participating Commands File, 9/6/1925 – 7/31/2003

This Public Use History Data is an extract from the AIMS Individual Awards Active and History File as of May 2004. NARA prepared the public use version by creating a subset consisting of the fields designated by the agency as the History file type, which are associated with approved awards. NARA also masked the characters in the Social Security Number field. In addition, the public use version also only includes records where the award approval date was on or before December 31, 1994.

For more details about the creation of the public use versions and the fields not included in the public use version, please review the series description and scanned technical documentation for these records.

5. How do the two versions of the AIMS Public Use History Data Files differ?

Essentially the May 2004 version includes records that the agency corrected or added to AIMS after the transfer of the August 1993 version. Therefore, many of the individual and unit awards records found in the as of May 2004 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – 12/31/1994, are also in the as of August 1993 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – c. 1992.

There are some additional differences between the two versions:

- The as of August 1993 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – c. 1992, includes the field Name of Cited Unit for unit awards records. This field is not present in the as of May 2004 version.
- The as of May 2004 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – 12/31/1994, includes the field Indicates Membership in a Specific Corps. This field is not in the as of August 1993 version.
- The as of August 1993 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – c. 1992, contains 672,046 individual award records and 38,791 unit award records.
- The as of May 2004 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – 12/31/1994, contains 1,088,114 individual award records and 5,590 unit award records.
- The code lists provided with the May 2004 transfer contain some revised meanings compared with the documentation provided with the August 1993 version.
- There may be records in one version, but not in the other.

6. How do the Public Use History Data Files and the Participating Commands Files relate?

Each record in the Participating Commands file contains information about one participating command. Each participating command record may be associated with one or more unit or individual award records in the History file. The records in the two files are linked by the number in the Participating Command's ID or Participating Commands Identification fields. However, relatively few of the participating commands identified in the Public Use History Data Files records are represented in the Participating Commands files.

7. Can there be more than one record for an individual or unit?

Yes. There are several reasons why there may be multiple records:

- The individual or unit may have received or been recommended for multiple awards.
- The agency may have corrected records so there may be the original record and a corrected record. The Month, Day, and Year Record Was Modified field may help indicate if the agency made changes to the record.
- There may be records for an individual or unit award in both versions of the Public Use History Data Files since the AIMS records in the as of May 2004 version included many of the records from the as of August 1993 version.

Users should search all relevant files to retrieve all possible records.

8. How do I identify records for individual awards versus unit awards?

The Public Use History Data Files include records for individual and unit awards. When the agency developed AIMS, they created a layout that captured information for both individual and unit awards. The Individual or Unit Case Indicator field identifies whether the record of award is for an individual (code “I”) or unit (code “U”). The types of information included in the records vary accordingly.

9. What are some of the limitations of these files?

- Some of the records contain inconsistent dates and therefore may be inaccurate or incorrect. For example, in some records the date in the Date Award Approved or the Date Award Recommended fields is significantly earlier than the dates listed in the Start of Award Merit Period and End of Award Merit Period fields. In other records, the dates in the Start of Award Merit Period and End of Award Merit Period fields are inconsistent with the information in the Geographic Area in Which the Award Was Earned.
- Some of the records only have initials in the First Name field, not the full first name.
- The unit award records in the as of May 2004 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – 12/31/1994, do not include the name of the unit receiving the award. (The agency did not identify the cited unit field as part of the History file type for the as of May 2004 version.) The field Indicates Membership in a Specific Corps in the as of May 2004 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – 12/31/1994, may include an abbreviation of a unit name and will likely display as “Undefined Code” in the meaning column on AAD. Users should also search the as of August 1993 Public Use History Data File, c. 1925 – c. 1992, for any unit award records as that file includes the field Name of Cited Unit for unit awards records.
- Relatively few of the participating commands identified in the Public Use History Data Files records are represented in the Participating Commands Files.
- The agency revised some of the meanings for coded values in the May 2004 version. Therefore, the same record in both versions may have slightly different meanings for some coded values.

10. Are there plans to correct any errors in the AIMS records?

No. As an archives, NARA’s role is to preserve the integrity of the records that Federal agencies transfer for archival preservation, even if the records include objective inaccuracies. For that reason, NARA does not correct or revise accessioned records.

11. What does O9B33 mean?

It is the office symbol for the Awards and Special Projects Branch. The full office symbol is OPO9B33 for the Chief of Naval Operations, Awards and Special Projects Branch.

12. Why were these records created?

The Department of the Navy, Board of Decorations and Medals, developed the Awards Information Management System (AIMS) to support the processing of award recommendations submitted for approval by the Chief of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, or the Secretary of the Navy. Data from AIMS was used to produce letters about approved awards; certificates; monthly statistics for the Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps; and various reports including ad hoc reports. Starting in 1999, awards submitted to the Commandant of the Marine Corps were processed through a separate Marine Corps awards system named the Awards Processing System. Awards for Marines submitted for approval to the Secretary of the Navy continue to be processed through AIMS.

13. How can I access a copy of the full files?

The raw data file, along with the associated technical documentation, may be downloaded from the National Archives Catalog at: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>. There you can search by the series name, Awards Information Management System (AIMS) Files, or using the National Archives Identifier 620316, which is the description identifier for this series.

In the results, select to view the full series description. Click on the link “file(s) described in the catalog” next to “Includes:” for a list of the file units within this series. Then select the file unit containing the records of interest to you. The file unit description will include the list of electronic records and documentation files available for viewing and/or downloading.

Additional information about downloading electronic records from the Catalog is available at: <https://www.archives.gov/research/electronic-records/access-in-catalog-faqs>.

Please keep in mind that the data file consists of the raw structured data as loaded into AAD (i.e. the coded values without meanings), but without the AAD software that displays the meanings for coded values and field titles. For more details about using files containing raw structured data, you may wish to review our "Introduction to Raw Data" at: <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/electronic-records/raw-data-intro.pdf>.