



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

World War II Army Enlistment Records, 6/1/2002 -
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Record Group 64

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I. Questions about the WWII Army Enlistment Records

I.1. What information is in the WWII Army Enlistment Records accessible through AAD?

The WWII Army Enlistment Records contain records of approximately nine million men and women who enlisted or reenlisted in the United States Army, including the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. The records do not include all Army enlistees and do not include Navy or Marine Corps enlistees.

There are two files of records available via AAD: Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File (Enlistment Records) and the Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File (Reserve Corps Records). In general, the records contain the serial number, name, state and county of residence, place of enlistment, date of enlistment, grade, Army branch, term of enlistment, longevity, nativity (place of birth), year of birth, race, education, civilian occupation, marital status, component, and box and reel number of the microfilm.

I.2. Where did this information come from?

During World War II, the U.S. Army created an IBM punch card record for each enlistee at the time of his/her enlistment or reenlistment. The records conform to the format found on War Department Adjutant General's Office (WD AGO) Form 317 (Enlistment Card) for the period ca. 1941-1945, WD AGO Form 372 (Enlistment Card) for ca. 1945-1946, and on Enlisted Reserve Corps (E.R.C.) Statistical cards. After WWII, the U.S. Army microfilmed the punched cards in serial number order and destroyed the actual punch cards. NARA accessioned the 1,586 rolls of microfilmed punched cards in 1959. Please note the microfilm is in poor condition and only contains images of the punch cards. See also the below FAQ "What is the significance of the "Box Number" and "Film Reel Number" data in the enlistment records?".

I.3. Why are these records available in a contemporary digital format?

In 1994, NARA converted the Army Serial Number microfilm of computer punch cards to a contemporary digital format to support the military records reconstruction project for records lost in the 1973 fire at the National Military Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. The version of the files available in AAD resulted from a subsequent project in 2002 to prepare the records for use in AAD.

I.4. What are some of the limitations of these records?

- About 13% of the microfilmed punch cards, about 1.5 million cards, could not be scanned into the electronic file and so are not in the electronic WWII Army Enlistment Records. See the Scope & Content Note and General Note in the series description for further information.

- About 35% of the electronic WWII Army Enlistment Records have a scanning error. Most of these errors are because of the poor condition of the microfilm and the scanning mechanism could not properly “read” various characters on the punch cards.
- Other errors in the records may have occurred when the War Department created the original punch card.
- Since the Army did not transfer to NARA any official documentation for the punch cards when they transferred the microfilm, NARA staff have assembled instructions related to the punch cards and the meanings for most of the codes from various textual records of the War Department and U.S. Army in NARA’s custody.

I.5. What happened when the scanning mechanism could not “read” a character on the punch card?

When the scanning mechanism could not “read” a character, it replaced the “unreadable” character with a blank space. To make the records available on AAD, blank spaces are represented by the “#” character. See the FAQs below on searching the records for more details. Also, the scanning mechanism sometimes incorrectly converted characters, introducing other errors in the records. See the Scope & Content Note and General Note in the series description for further information.

I.6. If 35% of these records have errors, why is NARA making the records available in AAD?

NARA staff compared a random sample of the records in the electronic WWII Army Enlistment Records with the microfilmed punch cards. Only 4.7% of the records had any character error in the name field and only 1.3% had character errors in the serial number field. While a large number of records had other errors, they were minor. For example, the TERM OF ENLISTMENT field frequently has the value of “0” in the electronic file where no punch appears on the original card. Other errors can be intuitively corrected by the users, such as understanding “POT” or “PVO” to mean PVT in the GRADE field.

I.7. Are there plans to correct errors in the WWII Army Enlistment 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. Even though the scanning process introduced errors that were not in the microfilmed punch card records, NARA accessioned the digital WWII Army Enlistment Records “as is” and as records created by NARA. NARA has no plans to revise or add to these records.

I.8. Why are the enlistee's height, weight, and military occupational specialty not included in the records accessible through AAD?

Some Enlistment cards include fields for Height and Weight, but instructions for their use or disuse changed during the war. Some versions of the Enlistment cards and instructions indicate that the same fields (columns 74-78) were used for Military Occupational Specialty or for other purposes. None of the instructions clearly indicate when, if ever, data for Height and Weight or Military Occupational Specialty were punched into the Enlistment cards. For this reason, the data recorded in these fields are not displayed in the records in AAD. The raw data electronic records that NARA preserves retain whatever values were punched in these fields.

I.9. How can I access a copy of the full file?

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, World War II Army Enlistment Records, or using the National Archives Identifier 573343, 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>.

II. Questions about searching the WWII Army Enlistment Records and search results via the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) resource

II.1. How do I find records in the WWII Army Enlistment Records?

Searching these records is similar to searching other files in AAD. Like other files, wildcard characters (% or *) are useful when searching. In addition, you may need to use a combination of other fields in your search as a way to help identify records. But keep in mind when searching the WWII Army Enlistment Records that the conversion process rendered "unreadable" characters as blank spaces, which are represented by the "#" character. If no other search strategies return results, try systematically replacing the characters of an Army serial number or name with # and enclose the value in quotes.

II.2. How do I search by the last four digits of an Army serial number?

At this time, AAD does not support a search using the last four digits of a serial number because the search criteria for this field cannot contain a wildcard (% or *) character in the first, second, or third position. Search criteria for this field should include at least three alpha-numeric characters before the wildcard character.

II.3. How do I search by NAME?

The name field includes all possible parts of a name: surname, space, first name, space, middle initial, and SR, JR, 3rd, etc. Because all parts of a name are in one field, a search for SMITH returns records with the word SMITH as a first or last name. If you are unable to find a match on a complete name, try using only the first name, surname, or the beginning of a name (at least three characters) followed by a wildcard character. When the full name exceeded the number of characters available in the NAME field (24 characters), as much of the surname as possible was included and the initials for the first name.

To search for a name with a prefix such as “Mac,” “Mc,” “de,” “Van,” etc., when the first letter of the rest of the name is capitalized, you will need to insert a space between the prefix and the rest of the name. Names with apostrophes usually do not have a space between the prefix and the rest of the name. For example: McAfee = MC AFFEE; Mcaffee = MCAFFEE; Van Heusen = VAN HEUSEN; and O’Brien = OBRIEN.

Since # characters represent blank spaces, the spaces separating parts of a name are also represented with the #. However, you can use blank spaces and do not need to use the # character when entering search values.

The # characters also represent “unreadable characters” and may be anywhere in the NAME field, even the first character. For example, there are over 80,000 records for persons named SMITH. But there are also 390 records with the name #MITH; 65 records with SM#TH; 60 records with SMIT##; and so forth. If you search for SM#ITH you will retrieve records that contain SM and ITH, but not necessarily separated by a single # or in the same order. To look for SM#TH as a single unit, you enclose it in quotes: “SM#TH”. Any leading or trailing #s are ignored, so #MITH searches for MITH. Systematically replace characters of a name with # and enclose the value in quotes if no other search strategies return results.

II.4. How do I search by RESIDENCE: STATE?

Since the codes for the RESIDENCE: COUNTY field are linked to specific codes in the RESIDENCE: STATE field, you can select only one code at a time from the RESIDENCE: STATE code table if your search page includes RESIDENCE: COUNTY. To select multiple state codes for a single search (for example, to use all codes for a state), you should use the “Show More Fields” option and de-select RESIDENCE: COUNTY as a search field.

The state of residence code is a two-digit numeric code in most of the records. However, approximately 78,000 records have an alpha-numeric code in this field. The War Department used alpha-numeric codes to indicate state of residence and limited service or conscientious objector enlistment, which allows for three possible codes for each state. An alpha-numeric code may also indicate a foreign country as the residence. In most records where the field RESIDENCE: COUNTY is zero-filled and the field RESIDENCE: STATE has an alpha-numeric code, the meaning seems to be a foreign country. See the Detailed Field Information linked to the field title RESIDENCE: STATE for more details. In some cases, an alpha-numeric code may be an error due to the multi-stage conversion process.

II.5. Why can't I find a specific record(s)?

There are many reasons why you may not find the record(s) you seek:

- The original punch card had data entry errors, or the scanner incorrectly converted one or more characters and/or was unable to “read” one or more characters. No other compiled source for this information exists.
- You ran a fielded search in only one of the two files in the series. If you are using the fielded-search option or a combination of free-text and fielded searching, you must search in each file separately to find all possible records.
- The series of WWII Army Enlistment Records does not have records for Army officers, members of other services, and/or enlistments for other time periods. It only contains records for persons who enlisted in the Army, Army Reserves, and Women's Army Auxiliary Corps between 1938-1946.
- The scanner could not read about 13% of the microfilmed punch card records, approximately 1.5 million punch cards, for inclusion in the digital WWII Army Enlistment Records series. For a list of the serial number ranges included in the records in the digital WWII Army Enlistment Records, please read the Scope & Content Note and General Notes in the series description.
- The WWII Army Enlistment Records seem to contain one enlistment record for an individual, the one with the later enlistment date. As far as we can determine, when someone reenlisted, the War Department removed his/her original enlistment punch card record from this file and replaced it with the punch card record created at the time of reenlistment. Information in the SOURCE OF ARMY PERSONNEL field may provide some indication if the individual had prior military service and thus may be reenlisting.

II.6. Why do some fields say "Undefined Code"?

A meaning of “Undefined Code” may be due to data entry errors, scanning errors, or simply a value whose meaning is unknown. If the value for a field includes a # and has a meaning of “Undefined Code,” a potential list of meanings can be determined by selecting the code list from the search screen, sorting the code by coded value, and looking at all of the possible variations for this code.

For example, if the CIVILIAN OCCUPATION field has the value #42, the meaning will be “Undefined Code.” Potential meanings for #42 may be determined by looking at Civilian Occupation codes with the values of 042, 142, 242, 342, etc.

If there is a meaning of “Undefined Code” in the RESIDENCE: COUNTY field, it is because the state code is undefined. The codes for the RESIDENCE: COUNTY field are dependent on the codes used in the RESIDENCE: STATE field. For each state, the counties were coded in alphabetical order with the first county listed receiving county code 001, the second county receiving county code 002, and so forth. For example, the county code 001 means Androscoggin when the state code is 12 (Maine), but it means Adair when the state code is 84 (Oklahoma). So if the state code is undefined, then the county code is also undefined, even if the county code is valid, as that county code is listed with multiple states.

II.7. What is the significance of the “Box Number” and “Film Reel Number” data in the enlistment records? Are they citations for additional records?

The “Box Number” and “Film Reel Number” data in the World War II Army Enlistment Records is the box and film number for the scanned microfilm of the IBM punch cards that are the source for this series. The microfilmed IBM punch cards, to which the “Box Number” and “Film Reel Number” fields refer, contain the same information as the records accessible online via AAD. They do not contain additional information. See the above FAQ “Where did this information come from?”.

III. Questions about obtaining WWII military service records

III.1. How can I find military service records of World War II veterans?

The National Archives at St. Louis and the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis have military service records for most personnel discharged since the early 20th century from the U.S. Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard.

The National Archives at St. Louis has military service records for personnel discharged from the military over 62 years ago. Their website is <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis>. The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis has military service records for personnel discharged less than 62 years ago. The NPRC website is <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center>.

Military service records are not online. Information on requesting copies of military service records is at <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>.

A 1973 fire damaged or destroyed many pre-1964 Air Force and pre-1960 Army records. However, NARA uses many alternate sources, including the WWII Army Enlistment Records, in its efforts to reconstruct basic service information to respond to requests. Additional information about veterans’ service records and related military records is at <https://www.archives.gov/veterans>.