



CIVIL WAR GENEALOGY: RESEARCHING CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS IN HISTORICAL RECORDS

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Civil War–era military records can reveal important details about ancestors who served during the conflict. This presentation explores the records associated with Confederate soldiers and shows how genealogists can locate these sources today using online databases and research tools.

Identify an Ancestor Who May Have Served

The Civil War began on 12 April 1861 and ended on 9 April 1865. Approximately 3.5 million soldiers fought on both sides of the war. About 1,082,119 of those soldiers enlisted to fight for the Confederacy. While many of the soldiers who fought in the Civil War were volunteers, it is possible that your ancestor was conscripted (drafted) into service. In fact, by 1862, both sides resorted to conscription, forcing men between the ages of 17 and 50 to register for military service.

Age – Most soldiers and sailors were men between the ages of 18 and 30, so they would have been born between 1831 and 1846. Some were as young as 10 or as old as 70, which widens the possible birth years to between 1791 and 1854.

Death – Did your ancestor die between April 1861 and June 1865? Did he die in a Southern state or a different state from where his family was living? These clues might indicate that he died as a soldier in the Civil War.

Residence – Where was your ancestor living when the war broke out in 1861? Check the 1860 and 1870 U.S. census, as well as state census records and substitutes. Confederate states included Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and the territories of Arizona (southern half of New Mexico and Arizona), and Oklahoma.

Other Clues:

- Census Records:
 - The 1910 census, column 30, asked if a person was a survivor of the Confederate Army (CA) or the Confederate Navy (CN).
 - The 1930 census, columns 30 and 31, asked whether a person was a veteran and of which conflict. Would be marked “civ” if a person served in the Civil War.
 - Some southern states took special censuses of Confederate veterans.
- Grave Markers – Look for a military grave marker, inscribed information, or a “flag” marker. Search *Find A Grave* for headstone photos and burial locations. Also check headstone application records (1925–1941) on *Ancestry* and *FamilySearch*; the federal government began providing headstones for Confederate veterans in 1906, and applications can confirm burial location and service details.
- Obituaries and newspaper clippings

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- Photographs, letters, and diaries
- Military papers and ephemera
- Battle souvenirs
- Reunions
- Lineage Societies - Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy
- Family traditions and stories

Identify the Regiment and Company

Your soldier's regiment and company are often needed to locate his records.

- *Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Database* - <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>. Watch for ancestors of the same name or initials. You will need to track the information and eliminate those who are not your ancestors. Note: As of early 2025, this database is no longer actively maintained or updated by the NPS, though it remains accessible.
- *Better Soldiers and Sailors* (Free) – A powerful alternative search tool using the same NPS data, with fuzzy/soundex name matching and the ability to export results. Particularly useful now that the NPS database is no longer updated. <https://www.betersoldiersandsailors.com>
- “Civil War (1861–1865) Military Records” (\$) - <https://www.ancestry.com/c/military-records/civil-war-records>

Locate the Service Record

The Compiled Military Service Records (CMSRs) for Confederate soldiers were assembled by the U.S. War Department beginning in 1903. Researchers abstracted information from original Confederate muster rolls, payrolls, hospital records, prison registers, and other documents onto individual cards, which were then filed by state and regiment. A CMSR may include rank, unit, date of enlistment, length of service, age, place of birth, physical description, and date of death. Note that Confederate CMSRs are generally less complete than Union records, as many original Confederate documents were lost or destroyed during the war.

- *Fold3* - “Civil War – Confederate Service Records” (\$) <https://www.fold3.com/publication/29/us-civil-war-service-records-cmsr-confederate-confederate-government-csa-1861-1865>
Records are arranged by state and unit.
- *FamilySearch* - “United States Civil War Service Records of Confederate Soldiers, 1861-1865” <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/1932383>
- *Ancestry* - “U.S., Confederate Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865” (\$) <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2322/>
- *FamilySearch Wiki* – Links to Confederate Service Records https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Confederate_Service_Records#Compiled_Service_Records_of_Individual_States

Did He Receive a Pension?

Confederate pension records can be among the richest sources for genealogical research, often containing detailed personal and family information gathered years after the war. Unlike Union pensions, which are held at the National Archives, Confederate pensions were administered by individual states. **Soldiers**

applied for a pension from the state where they lived at the time of application, which may be different from the state in which they originally enlisted and served. Always check the state of residence at the time of application, not just the state of service. These records are held at the state archives level and are not found at the National Archives.

Where to find these records:

- *The National Archives* – List of States’ Confederate Pension Records:
<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/confederate/pension>
- *FamilySearch* Wiki – List of States’ Confederate Pension Records (some include images)
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Confederate_Pension_Records
- *Ancestry* – Confederate Pension Collections (\$)
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/catalog/?keyword=confederate%20pension>

Did He Apply for a Pardon?

After the war, President Andrew Johnson required many former Confederates — particularly officers and prominent citizens — to apply individually for a presidential pardon. These applications, known as the *Confederate Amnesty Papers* (1865–1867), can be rich genealogical sources. They often include the applicant’s residence, occupation, a description of his Confederate service, an oath of allegiance, and character references from neighbors or community leaders. They are especially valuable when service records are incomplete. Not every soldier applied; pardons were most commonly required for officers, government officials, and men of property.

Where to find these records:

- *FamilySearch* – “United States, Civil War Confederate Applications for Pardons, 1865–1867” (free index; images link to Fold3) <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/1936545>
- *Fold3* – “Confederate Amnesty Papers, 1865–1867” (\$)
<https://www.fold3.com/publication/59/us-confederate-amnesty-papers-1865-1867>

Research the Regiment

To better understand your ancestor’s military experience, learn the history of his regiment. Where did his regiment travel? Which battles did they participate in? Were they captured and taken prisoner?

National Park Service’s “Soldiers and Sailors Database” > “Battle Units”

<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units.htm>

U.S. Civil War Regimental Histories at the Library of Congress (Research Guide)

<https://guides.loc.gov/civil-war-regimental-histories>

Many regimental histories have been digitized and are free to read online at *HathiTrust* (hathitrust.org) and the *Internet Archive* (archive.org). Search the title of your ancestor’s regiment to find digitized copies.

The War of the Rebellion: Official Records (the “OR”) – The 128-volume official compilation of Union and Confederate battle reports, correspondence, and orders. Indispensable for understanding what a regiment experienced. Available free on *HathiTrust*: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000625514>

FamilySearch Wiki: “Confederate Regular Troops in the Civil War”

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Confederate_Regular_Troops_in_the_Civil_War

The Civil War in the East - <https://civilwarintheeast.com> – Unit histories, biographies, and timelines focused on the Eastern Theater (Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania). Most useful if your ancestor served in that region.

Maps:

- *Fold3* has an excellent collection of Civil War maps, which are **free** to use. These are arranged by state/region and location. <https://www.fold3.com/publication/699/civil-war-maps> (copy and paste the URL if you get an error)
- Civil War Maps at the Library of Congress - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-war-maps>
- David Rumsey Collection: Civil War Maps - <https://www.davidrumsey.com/civil.htm>

Prison Records:

- “U.S., Civil War Prisoner of War Records, 1861-1865” at *Ancestry* (\$) <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/civilwarpow>

Casualty Reports:

- “Confederate Casualty Reports” (\$) - <https://www.fold3.com/title/770/confederate-casualty-reports> (copy and paste the URL if you get an error)

Confederate Citizens File:

- “Confederate Citizens File, 1861–1865” (\$) at *Fold3* – Over 650,000 vouchers and documents filed by Southern civilians and businesses that supplied the Confederate government. Useful for establishing context around a soldier’s family and community. (Also available free at *FamilySearch* under “Papers of Citizens or Businesses 1861–1865.”) <https://www.fold3.com/publication/60/us-confederate-citizens-file-1861-1865>

Photographs:

- Civil War Photos at the *National Archives* - <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/photos>
- “The Civil War” at *PBS* - <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-civil-war/photo-gallery>

Diaries, letters, and personal narratives:

- *Civil War Digital* - https://www.civilwardigital.com/html/civil_war_diaries.html

Old Soldiers Home Records

Where did your Confederate ancestor spend his senior years? If he had no one to care for him, he might have checked into an “old soldier’s” home. Many Southern states maintained soldier homes for Confederate veterans.

FamilySearch Wiki: “United States Military Old Soldiers Home Records”

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Military_Old_Soldiers_Home_Records

Additional Resources

Texas Heritage Museum Historical Research Center at Hill College – Nationally recognized Civil War repository with an emphasis on Confederate military history.

<https://www.hillcollege.edu/Museum/Index.html>

Civil War Records at the National Archives

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/resources#confed>

Confederate Veteran Magazine (some issues available at *Internet Archive*)

<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=confedvet>

Civil War Talk – Forums for discussion of Civil War topics – <https://civilwartalk.com>

Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) – <https://scv.org>

United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) – <https://hqudc.org>