

## **Reassembling A World War II Service Record**

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1. Important Questions to Ask before beginning Your Research
  - a. How much identifying information do I have on my WWII veteran?  
(e.g. name, date of birth, service number, branch of service, enlistment date, MOS [military occupational specialty], character of service, discharge status)
  - b. What unit did the veteran serve with during the war?  
(e.g. 101st Airborne, 2nd Armored Division, 1st Marine Division, USS Hornet, PT-109, etc.)
  - c. Do I have any primary source material in my possession already?  
(e.g. Separation document [DD214], Discharge certificate, dog tags, draft letter, enlistment card, personal letters / photographs, telegrams, death certificates, etc.)
2. WWII records are unique when it comes to researching genealogical and military history topics. Navy and Marine Corps records were unaffected by the 1973 fire, but Army and Army Air Corps/Force records were significantly damaged. Missing information, gaps in the service period, and verifying certain types of military information are common obstacles when utilizing the 'B' Files (Burnt Records).
3. The National Personnel Records Center uses a variety of internal and external sources to reconstruct a broad picture of a WWII service member's military information which can be used to apply for financial or burial benefits. The information acquired from accessing specific resources and utilizing the full availability of NPRC and NARA holdings creates a more complete picture of one's WWII service.
4. Records that suffered severe fire or water damage, but are still salvageable undergo an intensive reconstruction process. Small bits of charred records are put back together, scanned, and digitally enhanced. 'RECON' technicians at the NPRC are trained to handle burnt and mold damaged records. This process takes a significant amount of time, but it provides the requester with as much veteran information along with accompanying information from secondary sources.
5. How does the NPRC reconstruct a burnt WWII service record?
  - a. The NPRC standard operating procedure for handling WWII records: Archival records all carry a reproduction fee (unless used for financial or burial benefits). If the record is identified as burned, auxiliary records are used to compare submitted information with available sources.

- b. P-payroll vouchers: discharge date, character of service, rank, service number, duty station
- c. E-enlistment / induction: name, DOB, enlistment date, SN
- d. D-Discharge orders
- e. C-Clinical coversheets: hospital records, SN, discharge, character
- f. SGO-Surgeon General's Office: SN
- g. J-JAG Memos, Court Martial
- h. K,W-WWII and Korea POWs
- i. Officer payroll records, Flight records, Air Force award cards, unit records, sick reports, daily logs, officer registers, FBI military background check, Selective Service System, Order of Battle / History of divisions, division commands and staff, casualty lists, state and county record offices
- j. The NPRC creates forms NA13038, a Summary of Service, and others that verify a veteran's status to include pertinent information. If they can verify that the person was a veteran through VA claims, but can find no supporting documentation, this is the bare minimum of what the NPRC can provide.

#### 6. Request Process for Archival Records

- a. Records older than 62 years from the veteran's date of birth are classified as archival records. Archival records are fully available to the general public and maybe purchased for a reproduction fee. Requesters can choose to purchase a discharge document or the entire service record.
- b. In the case of burn records, the NPRC provides a full copy of the available documents in the record, along with a summary of military service with information obtained from auxiliary sources.

#### 7. You Have the Record, Now What?

- a. Interpreting record information can be tricky, especially if there are missing gaps. Establishing a timeline is a crucial first step (enlistment / induction date, promotion dates, transfers, hospital admissions, movements, discharge date). Knowing what dates are available will help determine length of service and cross referenced with location can help determine travel.
- b. Documents can show the primary unit a veteran serves with (company, ship, squadron, headquarters, etc.) Assume the veteran is with that unit for the duration unless you see orders or transfer showing differently.
- c. Compare the service record with unit records and you can trace the veteran's movements. This is helpful when determining entitlement to awards.