

RESEARCHING YOUR UNION SOLDIER

by Robert S. Davis, Jr.

Sources indicated with an asterisk () are in our collection at Wallace State.*

With the creation of the Record and Pension Office in the War Department in 1889, an effort began to consolidate information on military service in a usable form. This need had become critical as more and more old soldiers and their heirs needed evidence from these records for purposes of applying for military service pensions. The organizing of individual service data for Union soldiers, the men for whom most often requests for information came, received top priority. Consequently, the records of the federal veterans of the Civil War were not so completely brought together and centralized as those for the data of other veterans. For example, the Confederate service records, done last, were placed in a very accessible order by a clerical staff that by then had acquired considerable experience in organizing information. For background on these efforts see Mabel E. Deutrich, *Struggle for Supremacy: the Career of General Fred C. Ainsworth* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1962).

Consequently, although genealogically valuable records for federal service in the Civil War more likely survive in today's National Archives than the fragmentary surviving records gathered at the end of the war for the Confederates, often the information on the Union soldiers and sailors proves harder to access. For a basic introduction to Civil War records and research see Brian A. Brown, *In the Footsteps of the Blue and Gray: a Civil War Research Handbook* (Shawnee Mission, KS: Two Trails Genealogy Shop, 1996),* which even includes a list of some Civil War Internet web sites; and Nancy J. Morebeck, *Locating Union and Confederate Records* (North Salt Lake, Ut.: HeritageQuest, 2001)*. For more on Civil War research on the Internet see William G. Thomas and Alice F. Carter, *The Civil War on the Web* (2002). For more sources for Civil War research see Richard A. Sauers, *How to Do Civil War Research* (Conshohocken, Pa.: Combined Publishing, 2000).*

FEDERAL SERVICE COMPILED SERVICE RECORDS

Indexes to most of the federal compiled service records have been microfilmed by the National Archives, usually by state, although the alphabetically arranged records of the men serving in staff positions have not been filmed and have no index. For the microfilms of the indexes and the service records see *Military Service Records: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications* (Washington: National Archives, 1985).* The Broadfoot Publishing Company has been publishing the microfilmed indexes in book form and CD-Rom computer disk as *Roster of Union Soldiers 1861-1865*.* This material has no comprehensive index except access to the web site Ancestry.com.* This index is especially valuable as many men from one state, for any of a variety of reasons, enlisted in units raised in other states. For example, over 2,000 Georgians enlisted in Tennessee federal units. One sometimes successful way of locating an ancestor in the Union service, no matter what his regiment, is to search the nation-wide, strictly alphabetical index to federal pension records: National Archives microcopy T288 General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934.*

The American Civil War Research Database, on the Internet through Ancestry.com,* has at least something of a nation-wide index to federal service records built on state publications of rosters and related records. Presumably these and other sources used will provide names not found in the regular National Archives records. The Civil War Home Page on the Internet,* can lead the researcher to many different types of Civil War web sites including for individual units.

For matching federal officers with units, other sources exist in print. Among the works that the researcher can consult are U. S. Adjutant General's Office, *Official Army Register of the Volunteer Force of the United States Army for the Years 1861, '62, '63, '64 '65* (Washington: Government Printing office, 1867), the modern reprint includes a comprehensive index; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903); Edward W. Callahan, *List of Officers of the Navy. . .and of the Marine Corps, from 1775 to 1900* (New York: L. R. Hamersly, 1901); Lewis R. Hamersly, *The Records of Living Officers of the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1870); Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977);* John T. Hubbell and James W. Geary, *Biographical Dictionary of the Union: Northern Leaders of the Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990); Jack D. Welsh, *Medical Histories of Union Generals* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996);* Roger D. Hunt and Jack R. Brown, *Brevet Brigadier Generals in Blue* (Gaithersburg, MD: Olde Soldier Books, 1990); Guy V. Henry, *Military Record of Civilian Appointments in the United States Army* (1870); Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union* (New York: Facts On File, 1988);* and James Spencer, *Civil War Generals: Categorical Listings and a Biographical Directory* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986);* and William H. Powell and Edward Shippen, *Officers of the Army and Navy (Regular) Who Served in the Civil War* (Philadelphia, PA: L. R. Hamersley & Co., 1892).

The compiled service records created by the War Department from original records and now in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) do provide a gold mine of personal data. These files for soldiers and sailors, black and white frequently give, for each person, county of birth, physical description, and age. These records can be searched (for free) and copies obtained (for a fee) from National Archives, Washington, DC 20408. Ironically, almost all of these records for Union service that have been microfilmed to date are for units raised in the Confederate states. (We have these for several states.)

Soldiers could ask to have their service records amended. The National Archives usually has their letters in the records of the Enlisted Branch of RG 94 Adjutant General.

INFORMATION NOT FOUND IN THE COMPILED SERVICE RECORDS

Only data needed for basic documentation for service appears in the federal compiled service records. These files do not include all of the surviving information on every federal soldier. For example, when the muster-in and muster-out rolls survive at the National Archives for a federal unit, place of residence often appears on the rolls even when omitted from the compiled service record. (All of the northern states, except for the

states of the far west, Delaware, and Maryland, published this information around the turn of the century, however.)

Occasionally found in the last box or boxes (or roll if on microfilm) of the compiled service records for a particular unit are found miscellaneous additional records, arranged alphabetically by soldier. These files usually refer to men reported in some documents, such as hospital records, as members of the unit but for whom no compiled service record (based upon muster rolls) can be found.

The Military Records Branch also has, in addition to the compiled service records by state and then by unit, a separate collection of medical records for the volunteer soldiers of the Civil War and, usually, for the Mexican War of 1846-1848. These records for soldiers are arranged by state in Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General, Entry 534. Records of medical personnel are in Entry 535 and 538, while the naval personnel are in Entry 536 and the Marines in 538. The pioneer corps is in Entry 537. These original records can be searched and copies obtained by written or e-mail request to the National Archives. *We have these record on microfilm for the First Alabama Cavalry and a list of the Georgia soldiers is found in Northwest Georgia Historical and Genealogical Society Quarterly 26 (4) (1994): 6-10.**

Several National Archives micro-publications also lead to letters and other information on federal service in the Civil War. These films include M650 Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administrations of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, 1861-1869*; M502 Registers of Letters Received by the Secretary of the Treasury Relating to Claims, 1864-1887*; M1290 Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Not Enlisted by State (we have this in book form)*; M495 Indexes to Letters Received by the Secretary of War, 1861-1870*; M1105 Registers of the Records and Proceedings of the U. S. Army General Courts-Martial, 1809-1890*; and M725 Indexes to Letters Received by the Office of the [Federal] Adjutant General Main Series.*

For information on courts martials see Trevor K. Plante, "The Shady Side of the Family Tree: Civil War Union Court Martial Case Files," *Prologue: The Quarterly of the National Archives* 39 (1998): 314-19 and Kellee Blake, "'Ten Firkins of Butter and Other Traitorous Aid: Disloyalty Prosecutions in the Federal Civil Courts, 1861-1866," *ibid.*, 289-94. We have special lists of Alabamians and Georgians court martialed that are incomplete. Our National Archives microfilm holdings include the Levi C. Turner and Lafayette C. Baker files on questionable people in the area of the District of Columbia (M797).*

Some personal data lies even deeper in the federal records. To find this other material at the National Archives requires checking any of several published finding aids. The best general guide to records of all types in the National Archives is *Guide to Genealogical Research at the National Archives* (Washington: National Archives, 1986).* For the Civil War specifically, researchers should also see Michael Musick, "Honorable Reports: Battles, Campaigns, and Skirmishes--Civil War Records and Research," *Prologue: The Quarterly of the National Archives* 27 (1995): 259-77.* The National Archives has the claims filed with the United States government by government

contractors and others in Entry 788, Record Group 92 Records of the Quartermaster General. All Civil War claims of all types that made it to the Treasury Department are indexed in Entry 366, Record Group 56 Records of the U. S. Treasury. Claims paid by individual quartermasters during the war are listed in the monthly returns filed by the individual quartermasters in Record Group 92, entry 238. These claims have no index except to spies and scouts (entry 232).

Other sources exist for searches of specific records for special queries. The best such work remains Kenneth W. Munden and Henry Putney Beers, *The Union* (Washington: National Archives, 1986),* formerly published as *Guide to Federal Records Relating to the Civil War*. In addition to the sources at NARA, this work also includes some useful information on some sources found at other repositories. For even more detailed descriptions of the records see the following National Archives inventories: *Inventory no. 1: Records of the Headquarters of the Army; Inventory no. 17 Records of the Adjutant General's Office; Inventory no. 187: General Records of the Department of the Treasury; and Inventory no. 17: Inventory of the Records of the Accounting Offices of the Department of the Treasury*. For holdings of the National Archives in general see *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States* (3 vols., Washington: National Archives Trust, 1995).*

Many of the men called up for service were not accepted but still left personal information in draft records that survive in the National Archives. No attempt at a federal draft took place in the federally occupied areas of the Confederacy. The draft lists, arranged by congressional district, are in Record Group 110 Records of the Provost Marshal. For information on using these records see Nancy Morebeck, "Civil War Union Draft Records," *Heritage Quest* (January/February 1999): 89-90.*

Records of spies, guides, and scouts provide another example of information not often found in service records. Hired by individual officers, these men and women usually have no compiled service records because they did their work outside of the regular military. Fragmentary records exist for the service of some of these people, however, in various entries of Record Group 94 Records of the Adjutant General and Record Group 393 Records of Continental Commands (see for example entry 874 part iv for some reports of the Army of the Cumberland). In Record Group 110 Records of the Provost Marshal, can be found some reports and pay receipts for intelligence agents. Names of some of these operatives from Entry 36 of Record Group 110 appear in "Union Spies, Guides, Scouts, Railroad Operatives and Other Personnel, 1862-1865," *Georgia Genealogical Magazine* 33 (1993): 165-75. The spies listed in Entry 31 of Record Group 110 have a special index at the National Archives prepared by DeAnne Blanton.

Reference to captivity sometimes appears in individual service records, including on small slips of paper sometimes not copied when the service record is ordered from the National Archives. Additional information frequently can be found in the letters, lists, and claim files in Record Group 249 Records of the Commissary General of Prisoners. These documents sometimes include letters by prisoners and families of missing men; incomplete lists of escapees; and compensation paid to some of the former prisoners. When documents survive at all from Confederate operated prison camps, the records often only include dead lists. For records of specific camps see Henry Putney Beers, *The Confederacy*

(Washington: National Archives, 1986).* We have on microfilm the surviving records of Andersonville prison and also of Vermont POWS; as well as a database of prisoner records for Confederate prisons prepared by Jack Lundquist.*

POST CIVIL WAR SOURCES

As explained above, the index to federal Civil War pensions, National Archives microcopy T288, can identify a unit in which a soldier served. Other veterans records also provide personal information and even data on service not found in compiled service records. Letters at the National Archives from many pension applicants from many wars, but chiefly from persons seeking Union and Confederate pensions, are indexed by person and by subject in National Archives microcopy M686 Index to General Correspondence of the Record and Pension Office, 1889-1920.* (When a letter is missing from the latter, the National Archives also has a card catalog of abstracts of the letters with notes on action taken in response.) Records of pro-federal Civil War guerrillas and persons denied federal pensions for any of a variety of reasons can also be found through this source. When the original letter cannot be found, sometimes the information found on the letter appears in an abstract found in a set of notation cards also in the National Archives.

The index (M686 above) also often leads to information consolidated into files from the earlier Volunteer Service Division, Enlisted Branch, Colored Soldiers Bureau etc. of Record Group 94 Records of the Adjutant General. The correspondence and indexes of these other agencies also survive but are difficult to use and are best accessed in person at the National Archives. For more on these records see Beers, *The Union*, 260-64.* The records of the Commission Branch have been indexed and microfilmed as M1068 Name and Subject Index to the Letters Received by the Commission Branch and the Appointment Commission and Personnel Branch, 1864-1894, and M1064 Letters Received by the Commission Branch of the Adjutant General's Office, 1863-1870, respectively.

The pensions themselves, indexed in microfilm T288,* in National Archives Record Group 15 Records of the Veterans Administration, contain more information. Eventually pension claims were made on the service of some seventy per cent of the federal Civil War military. General federal service disability pensions began in 1890 although severely disabled war injury veterans; widows and orphans of federal soldiers killed in the war; and impoverished parents of federal soldiers killed in the war received pensions earlier. Other sources for pension information based on federal service, include National Archives microcopy T289 Organization Index to Pension Files (which also includes the Spanish American War pensions and the first World War I pensions; we have this on microfilm for Alabama and Georgia); M850 Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907-1933; M1749 Historical Registers of National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938; A1158 Number Index to Pension Files; M1279 Case Files. . .Widows and Other Dependents of Civil War and Later Navy Veterans; M1391 Lists of Navy Veterans for whom there are Navy Widows and Other Dependents Disapproved Pension Files, 1861-1910; and M1785 Index to Pension Application Files of Remarried Widows Based on Service in the Civil War and Later Wars. An 1883 list of federal pensioners for the Civil War and the War of 1812 was published as *U. S. Senate Executive Document 84 pt. 1 47th Congress 2nd Session Serial no. 2078* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883).* National Archives microcopy M123 is a census of federal, and a

few Confederate pensions, survives for the states of Kentucky (partial) through Wyoming. The Thirteenth (1910) federal census, National Archives microcopy T624, indicates survivors of the Confederate and Union armies but not which men specifically are pensioners.

The index to federal Civil War pensions (T288) contains a number of secrets.* When the pension has an "R" number, usually followed by an address, the civilian pension must be requested from Office of Personnel Management, Retirement Operations Center, PO Box 45, Boyers, PA 16017. If the pension card has a "C" or "XC" number that refers to a civilian pension of the War Department and should be ordered from a regional office of the Veterans Administration such as the one at 464 South Court Street, Montgomery, AL 36104. All other federal Civil War pension files should be ordered from National Archives, Washington, DC 20408.

We have the National Archives microfilm of applications to presidents Johnson (M650) and Grant (M968) for federal jobs. These files, although often containing extensive personal information, do not include the similar applications made to the Interior, Justice, Treasury, and War departments. These records have not been microfilmed. Searches and copies should be requested of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408-001.

A number of records of black and white Americans survive in various "freedman's records." We have on computer disk the records of The Freedman's Bank, which provides extensive personal information on thousands of blacks and a few whites (chiefly immigrants). The records of the Freedman's Bureau are often difficult to use. We have on order the microfilm of the local offices of the Alabama Freedman's Bureau. We already have microfilm of federal direct tax records from after the Civil War, some of which includes lists of Union veterans in Alabama.* We also have some of these records for Georgia.*

The compiled service records seldom give information on burials. Federal soldiers buried in national cemeteries are included in the federal government's series *The Roll of Honor*, expanded, reprinted, and indexed by the Genealogical Publishing Company, which has also made these volumes available on computer CD-ROM.* Mimi Jo Butler, *Cobb County, Georgia Cemeteries, Volume III, Marietta National Cemetery* (Marietta, GA: Cobb County Genealogical Society, 1994)* includes thousands of federal soldiers who died during the Atlanta campaign. A list of the first headstones provided to any federal veteran, wherever buried, is National Archives microcopy M1845 Card Records of Headstones Provided for Deceased Union Civil War Veterans, 1879-1903.* Another related National Archives microfilm is M2014 Burial Registers for Military Posts, 1768-1921.

The most extensive compilation of Civil War material ever published is the 128 books (sixty-nine "volumes" in four series plus the general index; volumes 54 and 55, a special index to series I, were never published) known as *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records* (1881-1901),* also called the *ORs*, and its thirty volume companion: *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*.* These volumes are a series of grammatically cleaned up official

letters and reports for the Civil War. Even obscure incidents frequently appear in these volumes. Thousands of persons are named and for the widest variety of reasons. For the background on this source see Alan C. and Barbara A. Aimone, *A User's Guide to the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* (Shippensburg, MD: White Mane, 1993).*

Accessing the *ORs* has become easier in recent years. Three companies now offer these volumes on CD-ROM computer disk,* an inexpensive and very precise means of searching these volumes by any word, name, or unit that is far superior to the incomplete original indexes. The *ORs* are also available on the Internet and can be searched for any word or combination of words at http://library8.library.cornell.edu/moa/moa_search.html (The original indexes still have value, however, for identifying persons referred to only by surnames in the volumes). Of great help in sorting out which volumes to read is the National Archive's five volume *Military Operations of the Civil War* (Washington: National Archives, 1986)* and Ronald A. Mosocco, *The Chronological Tracking of the American Civil War in the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* (Williamsburg, VA: James River Publications, 1993).* Volume one of *Military Operations* has been microfilmed by the National Archives, with additional material, as microcopy M1036 and volumes two through five have been filmed as M1815.

Broadfoot Publishing Company has published a supplement of over 100 volumes to the *ORs*.* Broadfoot has also reprinted, with an extensive index, *Medical and Surgical History of the Civil War* (we have the index), a source for information on thousands of individual federal and rebel battle injuries.

RELATED SOURCES NOT IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Many records of federal Civil War service were published by private individuals, including some veterans, and by individual state governments. Some manuscript materials also exist in the respective state libraries (or archives in some states) such as New York's state census of 1865. We have the autobiographical questionnaires for Tennessee.*

We have a number of non Federal records from immediately after the Civil War, in the Reconstruction era. These materials include the state censuses for Alabama and Mississippi (1866),* and the returns of qualified voters (1867) for Alabama and Georgia (1867-1868).* Researchers should consult our handouts on these records for more information.

Federal veterans organizations preserved a great deal of information on the men who served in the war. Members of the Grand Army of the Republic served in the federal military during the Civil War and never took up arms against the United States. Most of the surviving printed annual proceedings of the state divisions, often including member obituaries and other biographical information, are described in Albert E. Smith, Jr., *The Grand Army of the Republic: a Guide to Resources in the General Collections of the Library of Congress* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1996). Members of the GAR published reminiscences, unit histories, and veterans information in *The National Tribune*, starting c1880, a Washington, DC newspaper geared towards federal veterans that later became today's *Stars and Stripes*. The Library of Congress has some indexes to this newspaper. The historical articles from the published proceedings of the various

chapters of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States and the Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts have been published by the Broadfoot Publishing with extensive indexes.

Several veterans newspapers published accounts of the war. The greatest of these was the National Tribune (ancestor of the modern Stars & Stripes) of Washington, DC. Two bibliographies of this newspaper have been published, Helen H. Ellis, *The National Tribune* (1969) and Richard A. Sauers, *"To Care For Him Who Has Borne the Battle": Research guide to Civil War Material in the National Tribune* (1995).^{*} Sauers is preparing to publish a subject index to the *Tribune*. This newspaper can be borrowed on interlibrary loan from the Library of Congress.

BACKGROUND SOURCES

Beyond the personal information and individual service data found in the records of the National Archives, additional information on the experiences of the soldiers can be learned from the thousands of books and articles on the individual units, campaigns, leaders etc. Information on official federal units has been compiled in Frederick H. Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines: Dyer Publishing, 1908);^{*} Frank J. Welcher, *The Union Army 1861-1865: Organization and Operations* (2 vols., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989);^{*} William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses of the Civil War 1861-1865* (Albany, NY: Albany Publishing, 1889);^{*} Gilbert S. Bahn, *Infestation of Yankees: Reference Guide to Union Troops in Confederate Territory* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 1998),^{*} which indexes Frederick Phisterer, *Statistical Record of the Armies of the United States* (1883); and *The Union Army, a History of the Military Affairs in the Loyal States* (8 vols., 1908; rep. ed., Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1997).^{*} The latter source includes an excellent encyclopedic listing of battles and campaigns.

The National Archives has microfilmed each federal Civil War unit's compiled service records, or "locality" cards that give something of each unit's history and organization. These cards from National Archives microfilm M594, has been published by the Broadfoot company as part of their supplement to the *War of the Rebellion* series.

Major events on any day during the Civil War can be learned through various almanac type publications. These works include Robert E. Denny, *The Civil War Years: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of the Life of a Nation* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1992);^{*} Chris Bishop and Ian Drury, *1400 Days: the Civil War Day by Day* (New York: Gallery Books, 1990);^{*} and Navy History Division, *Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865* (Washington: Navy Department, 1971).

Beyond the manuscript and printed sources found in bibliographies and annotation of books on campaigns, regiments etc., bibliographies of Civil War source materials also exist. Many web sites on the Internet also provide sources on units and even some individuals. The standard Civil War bibliographies in print include:

Dornbusch, Charles Emil. *Military Bibliography of the Civil War*. 4 vols. New York: New York Public Library, 1961-1987.

Lester, Robert E. *Civil War Unit Histories*. 4 vols. Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1992. The microfiche collection has almost every regimental history published before 1920.*

Murdock, Eugene Converse. *The Civil War in the North*. New York: Garland, 1987. Not indexed by unit; the table of contents is better access to this valuable book than its crude indexes.

Sellers, John R. *Civil War Manuscripts: A Guide to Collections in the Library of Congress*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1986.

Smith, Albert E. *Civil War Diaries and Personal Narratives, 1960-1994: a Select Bibliography of Books in the General Collections of the Library of Congress*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1997.

War Department. Office of the Chief of Staff. *Bibliography of State Participation in the Civil War, 1861-1866*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913.
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