

# Researching Your *American* World War I Veteran

Great War, War to End All Wars, World War



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## What we will cover today

- The war and America's involvement
- Determine if your ancestor served
- Research Sources
  - Military Service Records
  - Other records

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## Important dates during World War I

### 1914

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 28 June   | Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria assassinated in Sarajevo |
| 28 July   | Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia (a Russian ally)        |
| 4 August  | Germany invaded Belgium and begins the fighting                |
| 10 August | Austria-Hungary invaded Russia, opening Eastern front fighting |

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## 1915-1917

18 Feb 1915 Germany blockades the United Kingdom

7 May 1915 A German submarine sank the liner Lusitania

February 1917 Zimmerman telegram intercepted (German Ambassador Zimmerman asking Mexico to attack the U.S. in exchange for restoring land it lost in the Spanish American War)

**6 April 1917 United States declared war on Germany**

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## United States

Isolationist policy  
1914-1917 but

- U-boat activity off the North American coast
- Zimmerman telegram

***changed minds***



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April 6, 1917 - U.S.  
declares war on Germany

Late June 1917 - First  
U.S. troops sent to Europe



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## Americans tipped the balance to the Allies

### Two Major Campaigns

Belleau Wood 1-26 June 1918

Argonne Forest 26 September - 11 November 1918



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## World War One Centennial

<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/>

WWI Overview video



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## Consequences of the War

9 million soldiers died (some estimate nearly as many civilians)

21 million wounded

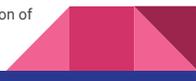
In the Ottoman Empire in 1915, 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed

Worldwide Spanish Influenza killed many millions more

### **Economic Consequences**

A cost of \$337 billion (\$1(1918)=\$16 (2017); accumulation of

War bonds leads to the Depression



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## Research Steps

- Determine if s/he served
- Censuses 1930 and 1940
- Home Resource Checklist
- Cemetery Clues
- Service records
- Contact your state adjutant general for discharge records

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## Determine if your ancestor served

How old was your potential soldier?

Age range of typical soldier, 17-40

Average birth year 1873-1900

United States Census 1930

Some states have military censuses (Connecticut)

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PERSONAL INFORMATION		HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION		MARRIAGE INFORMATION		MILITARY SERVICE		EDUCATION		OCCUPATION	
NAME	AGE	RELATIONSHIP	SEX	MARRIED	DATE	ARMY	NAVY	YEARS	SCHOOL	INDUSTRY	PROFESSION
John A. Smith	35	Head	M	Married	1905	U.S. Army		10	High School	Farmer	
Mary E. Smith	32	Wife	F	Married	1905				High School	Homemaker	
Robert L. Smith	12	Son	M	Never					Elementary	School	
Elizabeth M. Smith	10	Daughter	F	Never					Elementary	School	

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## U.S. Census 1930

Whether a veteran of U.S. military or naval forces

Yes                      What war or expedition?

Or

No

*yes*                      *W.W.*

VETERANS	
Whether a veteran of U. S. military or naval forces	
You or his	What war or expedition?
no	NA
yes	
yes	
yes	
yes	W.W.

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Full text of

### Connecticut Roster 1917-1920

Found on:

**Internet Archive**

[archive.org](http://archive.org)

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## Other ways to determine if he served

**Check home resource:**

- Family papers                      Newspaper articles and obituaries    Awards
- War diaries                          Oral traditions or interview older relatives
- Letters and postcards              Military photographs    Discharge papers

Military ephemera

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Military Diary & Photographs

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### Cemetery Clues




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U.S. Government Headstones

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## More Cemetery Clues

**American Battle Monuments Commission** (graves registry for veterans buried overseas) [abmc.gov/search/wwi.php](http://abmc.gov/search/wwi.php)

U.S. Headstone Applications for U.S. Military Veterans, 1925-1949, [Family Search.org](http://FamilySearch.org)

U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs: Nationwide Gravesite Locator, [gravelocator.cem.va.gov](http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov) (<http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov>)



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## Honoring Harry Cook

Rank: 2nd Lieutenant, U.S. Army

Unit: 90th Aero Squadron

Entered Service From:  
California

Date of Death: Dec. 5, 1918



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Survivors could visit European graves of their loved ones

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## Selective Service and the Draft of 1917

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## Selective Service

American Forces 1914-1918  
**May 18, 1917: Selective Service Act was passed**

1914: U.S. Army consists of 127,588 active

1914: National Guardsmen: 181,620 active

At the end of 1917 the Army had ½ million draftees and 233,000 volunteers.

1917-1918: 24 million men born between 1873 and 1900 filled Draft registration cards

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### Three Draft Registrations

- 5 June 1917: all men between ages 21 and 31
- 5 June 1918: men who had reached 21 after 5 June 1917; supplemental registration 24 August 1918 for those reaching 21 after 5 June 1918
- 12 September 1918: men ages 18 through 45



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### What information will I find?

Name in Full      Age

Home Address      Date of Birth

Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen (3) an alien (4) or have you declared your intention?(specify which)

Where were you born?

World War I Draft Registration Card A-15 June 1917

Registration Data		Registration Status	
1. Name in Full	2. Age	3. Date of Birth	4. Citizenship Status
5. Home Address	6. Date of Birth	7. Date of Registration	8. Signature
9. Occupation	10. Education	11. Physical Description	12. Remarks
13. Place of Birth	14. Date of Birth	15. Date of Registration	16. Signature
17. Citizenship Status	18. Date of Birth	19. Date of Registration	20. Signature
21. Place of Birth	22. Date of Birth	23. Date of Registration	24. Signature

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REGISTRATION CARD		4-2-13.A REGISTRATION REPORT	
1 Name and Address: <i>Charles John Roth</i>	2 Age: <i>23</i>	3 Residence: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	4 Date of Birth: <i>May 10 1889</i>
5 Place of Birth: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	6 Place of Education: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	7 Place of Employment: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	8 Place of Residence: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>
9 Place of Birth: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	10 Place of Education: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	11 Place of Employment: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	12 Place of Residence: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>

*John E. Parson*  
*Stanton, Md.*  
*June 5, 1917*

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REGISTRATION CARD		14-2-45 A REGISTRATION REPORT	
1 Name and Address: <i>Richard S. Lancaster</i>	2 Age: <i>24</i>	3 Residence: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	4 Date of Birth: <i>13 1893</i>
5 Place of Birth: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	6 Place of Education: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	7 Place of Employment: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	8 Place of Residence: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>
9 Place of Birth: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	10 Place of Education: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	11 Place of Employment: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>	12 Place of Residence: <i>Stanton, Md.</i>

*John E. Parson*  
*Stanton, Md.*  
*June 5, 1917*

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**Tip:**  
 Many registered and did not serve

Many served who didn't register with the draft.

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## Service Records

Veterans Service Records, [archives.gov/veterans](https://www.archives.gov/veterans)

U.S. Navy Log, [navylog.navy.mil](https://navylog.navy.mil)

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## Another fire!

July 12, 1973 in St. Louis



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July 12, 1973 in St. Louis



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## What was destroyed?

Approximately 16-18 million Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF). The records affected:

Branch	Personnel and Period Affected	Estimated Loss
Army	Personnel discharged November 1, 1912 to January 1, 1960	80%
Air Force	Personnel discharged September 25, 1947 to January 1, 1964 (with names alphabetically after Hubbard, James E.)	75%

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## What can we do?

Visit:

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) website <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis>

Request using: Standard Form 180,

*"Request Pertaining to Military Records"*

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## Learn more by watching this slideshow

*Finding Your World War I Veteran*

<https://www.archives.gov/files/st-louis/pdf/finding-your-ww1-veteran.pdf>

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**WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED TO LOCATE  
A  
MILITARY PERSONNEL RECORD?**



- » VETERAN'S COMPLETE NAME AS USED IN SERVICE
- » SERVICE NUMBER
- » BRANCH OF SERVICE
- » DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH
- » DATES OF SERVICE

FOR RECORDS AFFECTED BY THE 1973 FIRE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUCH AS: PLACE OF DISCHARGE, LAST ASSIGNED UNIT, AND PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE MAY BE USEFUL.

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**How do I request copies of  
Official Military Personnel Files?**

Individuals may access these records by:

- 1. MAIL A STANDARD FORM 107 (SF) REQUEST PREVIOUSLY TO MILITARY RECORDS TO:  
NATIONAL PERSONNEL RECORDS CENTER  
1 ARCHIVES DRIVE  
ST. LOUIS, MO 63138
- 2. FAX A STANDARD FORM 100 TO: 314-901-9195

UNASSERIALIZED FEDERAL RECORDS REQUESTS MAY ALSO BE MADE ONLINE VIA A WEBPAGE: <http://www.archives.gov/federal-records/military-records> OR BY VISITING THE FEDERAL RESEARCH ROOM BY CALLING 314-901-0900



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Did they enlist before April 6, 1917?



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U.S. citizens volunteered to serve in British and French forces

- The **Lafayette Escadrille**, a squadron in France's Aviation Militaire
- The **Foreign Legion**
- The **American Ambulance Field Service** was
  - organized in 1914
  - Served on the western front in France, Belgium and in Serbia later in the war
- The **American Red Cross** sent **nurses** to France along the Allied lines on the western front



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## Some Americans served thru Canada



### American Legion in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF)

Recruited Americans,

*more than twenty percent deserted in training*

Deployed as the 97th Overseas Battalion of the CEF in September 1916

After arriving in England the Legion was divided into other regiments, causing many resignations, volunteers had been led to believe they would be allowed to fight as local units

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## Other Sources

- VFW or American Legion

*Tip:*

Contact your State Adjutant General's Office for WWI Discharges

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## Other research sources

United States, YMCA World War I Service Cards, 1917-1919 [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)

About 27,600 index cards with names of people who served with the YMCA in WWI. Cards include names, ages, addresses, and occupations.

Regimental histories (many on the internet) some printed accounts only

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## Ancestry.com - Navy & Marines

U.S. Navy Casualties Books, 1776-1941.

U.S. Navy Cruise Books, 1918-2009

U.S. Navy Burial Records, 1898-1932

U.S. Navy Support Books, 1917-2011

U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1798-1958

U.S. Merchant Marine Applications for License of Officers 1914-49

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## More Ancestry.com

California World War I Death Announcements, 1918-1921 -

Histories, Awards and Decorations of Honor, News

There is more on Ancestry

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## Join a Service Organization

Order of the First World War

[orderfirstworldwar.com](http://orderfirstworldwar.com)

Descendants of World War I Veterans

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**Yeoman Ora Lee Hirsch**

Served in the Intelligence Office,  
decoding messages

Later married, taught school and  
served as the vice commander for  
women in the California

American Legion

**1895-1984 Santa Clara resident**



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Thank you for coming!

Good luck with your research!

Mary Boyle  
(408)815-2909  
mboyle@santacalaraca.gov

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