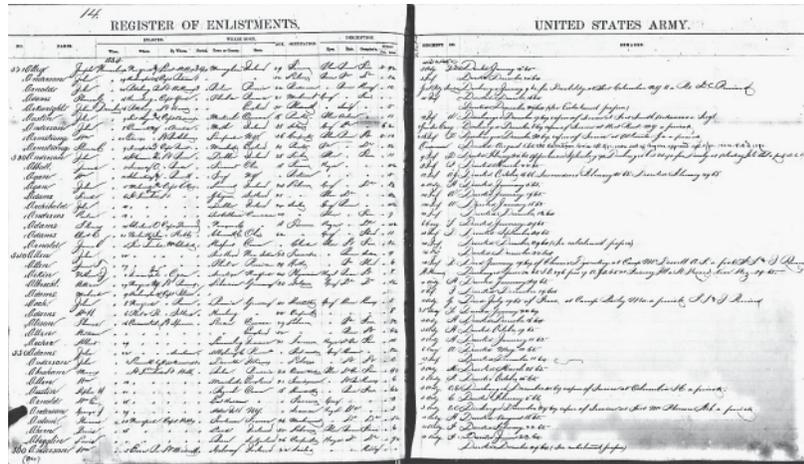


U.S. Regular Army Registers of Enlistment and enlistment papers, 1798–1914



Ancestors who served as enlisted men in the U.S. Regular Army left a trail of records to delve into that are both challenging and rewarding.¹ This article will focus on the registers of enlistment and related enlistment papers, and will add suggestions for further research.

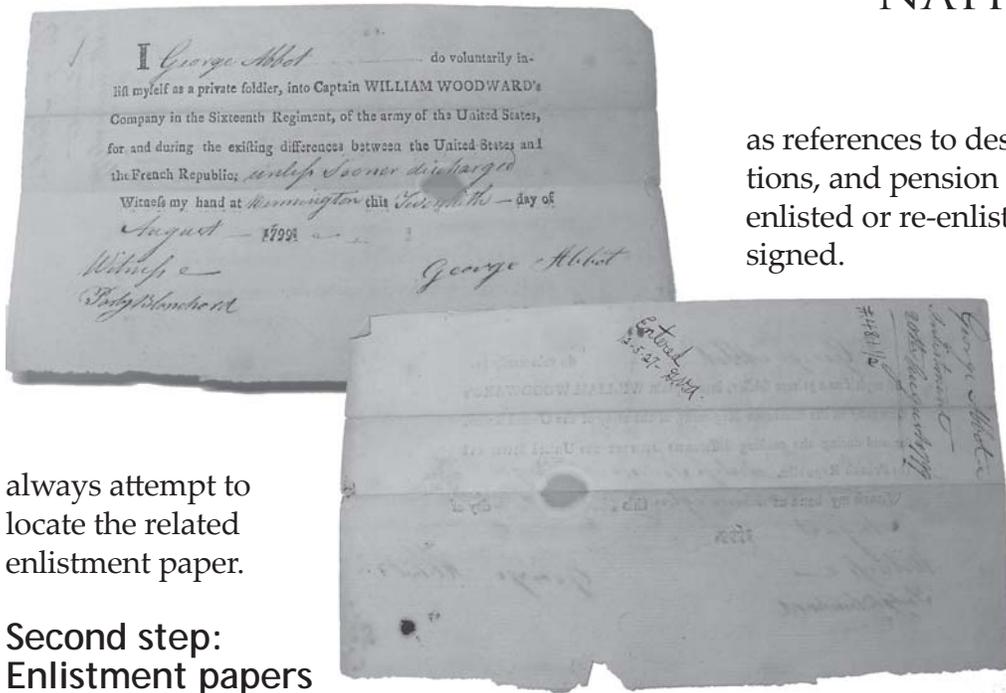
First step: Registers of Enlistment

Research for U.S. Regular Army enlisted men should begin with National Archives (NARA) Microfilm Publication M233, *Registers of Enlistments in the U.S. Army, 1798–1914* (81 rolls), which is accessible online at Ancestry.com as the “U.S. Army, Register of Enlistments, 1798–1914” database. The registers are arranged by time period, then roughly alphabetical by name. In addition, there are special registers for mounted rangers, 1832–33; Puerto Rico Provisional Infantry, 1901–14; Indian Scouts, 1866–1914; Philippine Scouts, 1901–13; ordnance, commissary, and post quartermaster sergeants, 1833–91; clerks and messengers, 1816–72; hospital stewards, 1854–99; records of prisoners, 1872–1901, and so forth. The M233 roll list is available without cost at the NARA Web site under “Order Online.”

“Registers” are normally a chronological listing of actions or events made about the same time as

the action or event itself occurred—think of your check register as an example—but entries in these registers were made long after the event (enlistment) occurred. Men were recruited for service from all over the country, making a simultaneously created register impractical. In addition, the well-organized nature of the registers and related enlistment papers points to the creation of the registers in the late nineteenth century as the Adjutant General’s Office organized its old records for greater administrative efficiency. Each register covers a specific time span, and then is arranged roughly alphabetically.

The registers contain the basic facts about a soldier and his enlistment, copied directly from the enlistment paper. As an added bonus, the earlier registers tend to include all of the information the War Department could find about a soldier from a variety of record sources, so these clues should help the researcher and archival staff locate the original records related to those matters. The registers for 1798–June 1821 also contain information about officers, militia (volunteer) soldiers and officers, and War of 1812 British and Canadian prisoners of war. Some useful details in the enlistment papers were *not* included in the registers, however, so the researcher should



always attempt to locate the related enlistment paper.

Second step: Enlistment papers

Enlistment papers, 1798–14 July 1894 and 15 July 1894–31 October 1912, are two record series among the Records of the Adjutant General's Office (Record Group 94) in NARA, Washington, D.C.²

The enlistment paper usually includes the name of the soldier, place of birth, age at time of enlistment, occupation, and a physical description of eyes, hair, complexion, height, and any scars, moles, and other physical imperfections noted by the examining surgeon. The date and place where the man enlisted, length of enlistment, the unit to which he was assigned, and the name and unit of the recruiting officer are also given. If the enlistment paper omits mentioning the unit to which the man was assigned, the name and unit of the recruiting officer are possible leads to further research. If the soldier was a minor, it also includes consent to his enlistment by a parent or guardian. During the Civil War, the papers also indicate the city, county, Congressional district, and state to which the man's enlistment was credited. (Each area had recruiting quotas at different times.) These records may also give the man's aliases or the name of the person for whom the soldier was a substitute.

At a later date, the Adjutant General's office sometimes annotated the enlistment paper (or added more papers) with additional details, such

as references to desertions, headstone applications, and pension case numbers. Each time a man enlisted or re-enlisted, an enlistment paper was signed.

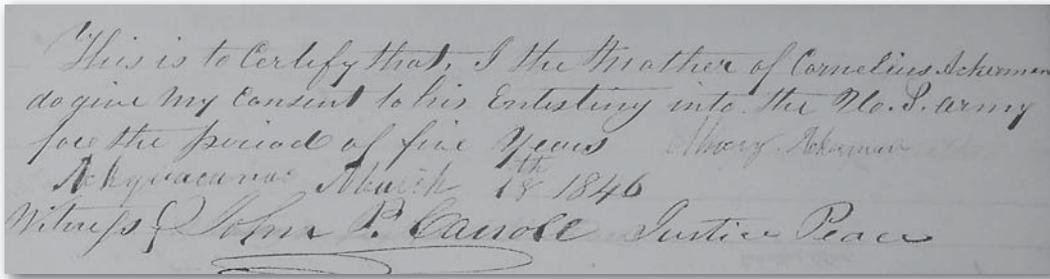
The enlistment papers are arranged alphabetically by surname, then by first name, and then usually chronologically by date of first enlistment. The records are not complete. For example, although the registers of enlistment may indicate several enlistments, only one or two may exist. There are also "markers" (place

holders) to indicate a name and recruitment but no additional information is given. Most of the information was handwritten onto a form.

Sample searches

Let's take a look at the records of a few soldiers to discover what the enlistment paper adds to the information provided in the related register.

George Abbot or Abbott, 1799. The register of enlistment indicates that on 20 August 1799 George Abbot was enlisted as a private in Captain William Woodward's Company, 16th U.S. Infantry. No additional information is given (M233, roll 1, volume 1, page 49). This man's enlistment paper provides a clue to his origins—George Abbott was enlisted at Bennington, Vermont—and notes that the duration of his enlistment was "for and during the existing differences between the United States and the French Republic; unless sooner discharged." Parley Blanchard witnessed Abbot's signature. Abbott's enlistment paper was found somewhere in the War Department records in 1927, so his inclusion in the register was a "late" one. The reverse side of his enlistment paper has the notation "Entered 2-5-27 G.V.A." and the number 481 1/2, which is also his "number" in the register. (G.V.A. are the initials of the clerk who entered



for the period of five years. [signed] Mary Ackerman."

John Aach, 1864. There are two entries in the registers of enlistment for this man. One is in the main series of reg-

the information into the register on 5 February 1927.)

John Accor (or Acker, Acar), 1807. The register of enlistment indicates that on 16 February 1807 at Baltimore, John Accor was enlisted as a private in the 2nd U.S. Infantry by Lieutenant Pinckney. He was a 33-year-old "yeoman or farmer" born in Middlesex, New Jersey. His height, and color of eyes, hair, and complexion are noted. During his military career, he was punished numerous times by lashing, slaps, or confinement to quarters for drunkenness, fighting, or neglect of duty. When his original enlistment expired in 1812, he re-enlisted and was not discharged until September 1815 (M233, roll 1, volume 1, page 67). This man's enlistment paper adds the additional specific detail that the enlistment took place at Fort McHenry. The alternate spellings in the register likely point to spellings of his name in the records relating to disciplinary proceedings against him.

Cornelius Ackerman, 1846. The register of enlistment indicates this man was enlisted by Lieutenant Burke, 1st Regiment of Artillery, on 18 March 1846 at New York City for five years. Ackerman was age 20 and was born at Putnam, New York. He was a tailor with hazel eyes, brown hair, fair complexion, and 5 feet 8 inches tall. He was assigned to Company E, 7th Infantry. He was discharged at Mexico City, 10 February 1848. The cryptic note, "P.O. March 4/53" points to an 1853 inquiry by the Pension Office, thus alerting the researcher to his pension or bounty land claim (M233, roll 21, volume 44, page 6). Those are great details about this man, but his enlistment paper provides a few more. The recruiting lieutenant's name is given as M. G. Burke. Ackerman was born at Putnam County, New York. Finally, his mother is identified: "This is to certify that I, the mother of Cornelius Ackerman do give my consent to his enlisting into the US Army

isters, a second is in the "duplicate" register. As always, researchers should check both entries for variances in information. The registers indicate that John Aach was age 41; a stonemason born in Prussia. He enlisted on 8 December 1864 at New York City by Captain Rawn, for a period of three years, and served in Company G, 4th Artillery, until discharged 17 July 1865 because of disease. His physical description is given. There is a notation that he was a substitute for C. W. Allen, and that he was at Division Hospital, Camp Bailey, Maryland (M233, roll 29, volume 58, page 14; roll 77, volume 147, page 17). Aach's enlistment paper adds several additional details. His enlistment occurred in New York City at 120 Chatham Street. He stated: "I, John Aach do hereby acknowledge to have agreed with Charles W. Allen to become his substitute in the military service for a consideration paid and delivered to me this 8th day of December 1864." His service was credited to Malone, Franklin County, 7th Congressional District, New York. Turning to the 1860 federal population census, we find that Allen was probably the Charles Allen, age 28, a merchant tailor with \$750 worth of personal property, who lived in A. R. Flanigan's hotel in Malone, New York (M653, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, roll 754, Malone, Franklin County, New York, page 66).

Frank A. Acocks, 1889 and 1895. This man enlisted twice, and therefore is listed in two different registers with different information. He was enlisted at Buffalo, New York, by Captain Drumm on 4 January 1889. His age was 22 years and 5 months. He was a carpenter born at Ellery Center, New York. He had gray eyes, brown hair, and a fair complexion. His height was 5 feet, 10 inches. He enlisted in Company B, 22nd U.S. Infantry and was discharged as a corporal at Fort Keogh, Montana, 5 September 1891, pursuant to Adjutant

General's Office Special Order 200 of 1891. His character was considered excellent (M233, roll 44, volume 84, page 23).

Acocks was re-enlisted at Des Moines, Iowa, by Captain Adams on 16 March 1895. His personal information was consistent with that given in 1889. This time he enlisted in the 1st U.S. Cavalry. He deserted 6 August 1895; surrendered 9 August 1895; and was dishonorably discharged as a private at Fort Riley, Kansas, on 20 September 1895, pursuant to Department of the Missouri Special Order 144 of 1895 (M233, roll 47, volume 90, page 13).

Acocks's enlistment paper for 1889 was located. The information it provides is consistent with the register of enlistment data noted above but adds additional detail. Captain Drumm's first name was John; Drumm's unit was the 10th U.S. Infantry. James Walsh witnessed Acocks's signature on the enlistment paper. In addition, there is a cryptic reference to correspondence in his "201 file" dated 29 March 1933. All modern federal employees, military or civilian, have 201 files. It contains personal information, as well as work history including promotions, transfers, disciplinary actions, and so forth. In Acocks's time it was a bit rare for an enlisted man to have such a file, but it is a lead worth pursuing. His enlistment papers also include a "Statement of Service Reference Slip" dated 29 August 1934 that indicates his pension file number (C-2418942) and states: "He served over 30 days in the zone of active Indian hostilities in North and South Dakota in 1890 and 1891, while on detached service with Troop H, 8th US Cavalry in the field."

Foreign-born men served in the U.S. Regular Army in large numbers. Since the registers and

the related enlistment papers provide each man's town of birth, these records are especially useful in identifying overseas origins. Let's take a count from the page of 1845–46 recruits that included Cornelius Ackerman. The foreign-born enlistees were from Ireland (11), England (3), Germany (2), Denmark (1), France (1), Sweden (1), and Switzerland (1). The U.S.-born recruits were from New York (9), Pennsylvania (6), Connecticut (2), Kentucky (2), New Jersey (2), Maryland (1), and Virginia (1). The page of 1895 recruits that included Frank Acocks shows fewer foreign-born recruits: Sweden (5), and one each from Austria, Denmark, England, Germany, and Russia. U.S.-born recruits were from more states: New York (4), Virginia (4), Ohio (3), Tennessee (3), Indiana (2), Iowa (2), Texas (2), and one each from the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

Next steps

To continue with more detailed studies, the researcher should consult a variety of other records. Expect this to be time-consuming research that requires a personal visit to the National Archives. The researcher needs to be persistent and imaginative to ferret out the information. Useful record series relating to Regular Army enlisted men in RG 94 include:

- *Muster rolls, 1791–1912*, lists of troops present or accounted for on a particular day.
- *Carded medical records, 1821–84 and 1894–1912*, relate to personnel admitted to hospitals for treatment.
- *Personal papers, 1861–1912*, might include descriptive lists, orders, assignment cards, physical

- examinations, certificates of disability, discharges, final statements, medical papers, or burial records.
- *Certificates of disability, 1812–99*, are certificates issued by surgeons recommending discharges for individual soldiers.
- *Final statements, 1862–99*, contain a record of death and burial of soldiers who died in service, and an inventory of their personal effects.
- *Descriptive lists, 1901–14*, include the name of the soldier, rank, unit, name and address of next of kin, personal description, and clothing and money accounts.
- *Reports of medical examination of recruits, 1884–1912*, provide identifying information about each man, prior military service, medical examination, and date and place of acceptance, enlistment, or rejection.
- *Correspondence* series are numerous, including letters received, letters sent, and indexes to these series.
- NARA Microfilm Publication M617, *Returns from United States Military Posts, 1800–1916* (1,550 rolls), show which units were stationed at a particular post, their strength, officers, and a record of events.

Other record groups also contain useful materials, such as the *courts-martial records, 1808–1939*, in RG 153, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General.

For more information

A useful outline of military service records in the National Archives is given by Trevor K. Plante, “An Overview of Records at the National Archives Relating to Military Service,” *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* 34 (Fall 2002): 230–39, online at <<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/fall/military-records-overview.html>>. Many genealogy articles from *Prologue* can be accessed online from <<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/genealogy-notes.html>>.

Additional detail on nineteenth-century Regular Army records is given in Chapter 4, Records of the Regular Army, in Anne B. Eales and Robert M. Kvasnicka, editors, *Guide to*

Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States (Washington, D.C.: NARA, 2000).

Descriptive pamphlets and roll lists for NARA microfilm publications are available for free through “Order Online” at <<https://eServices.archives.gov/orderonline/start.swe?SWECmd=Start>>. It is not necessary to register or buy anything. Just click the “Microfilm” tab to get started. Of course, “Order Online” can also be used to request copies of selected federal records for a fee.

An excellent example of a thorough search of the military career of an ordinary Regular Army soldier is provided by Elizabeth Kelley Kerstens, “Tracking a Soldier between Enlistment and Discharge: The Example of Private Charles Plucker,” *NGS Quarterly* 82 (December 1994): 245–54. 🌳

Notes

1. Most of the men who served in the War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War, Spanish-American War, and other conflicts were volunteers (even if drafted) and not part of the Regular Army. Researching volunteers is much simpler since each man has a Compiled Military Service Record (CMSR); see, for example, the discussion of these records in the “Civil War Records” page online at <<http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/military/civil-war/>>.

2. There is also a separate series of enlistments, 1784–1815, that is part of the “Post-Revolutionary War” papers in RG 94.

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