



# Compiled Military Service Records, Part V: The Book Mark

*In honor of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this is the fifteenth in a series of articles about records at the National Archives in Washington, DC, that are useful in researching the war and its participants.*

**I**n this article we examine the *Book Mark*, a cryptic note on the jacket of many Compiled Military Service Records (CMSRs) that leads to additional records and information about the soldier or his unit's history.

As noted in previous articles, individual soldiers' CMSRs were compiled by clerks in the Adjutant General's Office (AGO) from original muster rolls, payrolls, and other records to collect in one place, as far as humanly possible, most of the information about a soldier's service in one regiment. (His service in other regiments, if any, were separate files.) The AGO clerks then provided information from CMSRs to the Pension Office which determined the validity of soldiers' pension claims based on injury, or disease, or service.

When ambiguities, omissions, or errors in the original records were discovered—often the result of the Pension Office's examination of a pension

claim—the AGO investigated and recorded its decision about the issue in other record series found in Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s–1917. The AGO also made an annotation, called the *Book Mark*, upon the soldier's CMSR jacket, and included the decision itself on a "Notation" card or some other card(s) inside the CMSR.

Sometimes, none of the cards in the CMSR refer to the book mark. In this case, the researcher must obtain a copy of the book mark file to learn what it is about. For example, book mark R&P 436,786 on the CMSR jackets of Revolutionary War soldiers James, John, and William McCullar refers to an inquiry the AGO received many decades after the Revolutionary War from someone who wanted information about those three soldiers. Since the book mark material did not correct or clarify the soldiers' records, the AGO did not add a "Notation" card to the CMSRs.

## **John G. Acoff**

John G. Acoff served in Co. F, 1st New York Engineers. The book mark on his jacket, 10672-

B-78, has a related "Notation" card inside his CMSR that reads: "War Department, Record and Pension Division, Washington, Mch 24, 1892. This man, under the name John Acoff deserted from Co. A, 21 Reg't New York Cav. Mch. 6, 1865, and enlisted in this organization in violation of the 22d (now 50th) Article of War. This Department cannot recognize the legality of this enlistment, nor any claim for service rendered thereunder. The law views him as in a continuous state of desertion during the whole period of this enlistment." Cards inside

his CMSR strongly suggest John was a bounty jumper. On 8 March 1865, two days after his desertion from the 21st New York Cavalry, John enlisted as a private in the 1st New York Engineers. His incentive was the \$100 bounty paid to three-year enlistees, which he received on 10 March 1865. He was quickly promoted to artificer and then corporal, and was discharged from service on 30 June 1865. John's widow, Sarah J. Acoff, applied for a pension in 1890.

Book mark file 10672-B-78 is part of Enlisted Branch Letters Received, 1862–1889 (National Archives Identifier (NAID) 607910). It contains Mrs. Acoff's Application for Removal of Charge of Desertion, dated 15 September 1892, in which she alleges that he was discharged on 7 March 1865 "at Baltimore Md. by reason of Rheumatism (unfit for Invalid Corps.)," which seems an unlikely description of a man so soon accepted and promoted in an another regiment. It also contains Mrs. Acoff's letter to her attorneys, J. B. Cralle & Co., 14 March 1892, in which she expresses her surprise at the charge of desertion, since "my brother (who has been dead for some time) was his tentmate, and think if it had been true I should have heard of it through him." The book mark file also contains internal AGO correspondence about the matter, Acoff's medical records from the Surgeon General's Office, and correspondence with Mrs. Acoff's attorneys.

Some of the records in the book mark file refer to the Act of 2 March 1889 (25 Stat. 869), that permitted soldiers or their widows or other heirs to apply between 1 July 1889 and 30 June 1892 for desertion charges to be removed from the soldier's record if certain conditions were met. These conditions included enlisting in another unit without receiving a discharge from a previous unit so long as "such re-enlistment was not made for the purpose of securing bounty or other gratuity that he would not have been entitled to, had he remained under his original term of enlistment...." Acoff's acceptance of the bounty clearly doomed his widow's petition to remove the desertion charge. (The *Statutes at Large* from 1789 to 2012 are in convenient PDF

APPLICATION FOR REMOVAL OF CHARGE OF DESERTION.

State of New York County of Rensselaer ss:  
 ON this 15th day of Sept. A. D. 1892 personally appeared before me  
G. C. Crumman a Justice of the Peace and for the County of  
Rensselaer in the State of New York  
John Acoff of the County of Rensselaer  
 State of New York now a resident of Proctorville  
 County of Rensselaer State of New York who, being  
 duly sworn, declares that he is the identical John Acoff who was a  
Private in Company ... in the ... Regiment of  
 that he was enlisted in said Company and Regiment on or about the ... day of ... 1865  
 at Proctorville in the County of Rensselaer and State of  
New York by Chas. G. Otis mustered into service on or about the  
28th day of Aug. 1865 at Proctorville  
 in the County of Rensselaer and State of New York that  
 he served faithfully until on or about the 7th day of March 1865  
 when, without any intention of deserting, he left the Regiment under the following circumstances:  
He was sent by the Regimental  
Surgeon to the Hospital at  
Winchester West Virginia  
remained there until the 7th  
Jan'y. 1865 and was then  
transferred to Gro's Hospital  
at Baltimore Md.  
He was discharged from the  
service the 7th day of March 1865  
at Baltimore Md. by reason  
of Rheumatism (unfit for Invalid Corps.)

This declaration is made for the purpose of securing a removal of the charge of desertion, and he hereby  
 appoints, with full power of substitution and revocation, J. B. CRALLE & CO., of Washington, D. C., his  
 attorneys, to present this application, and to receive and receipt for the discharge that may be issued thereon,  
 and to do any and all acts necessary to effect the purpose of his said appointment. His Postoffice address  
 is St. Johns St. West Albany  
Barre N. H.  
Lemuel Tinney  
 (Two Witnesses who can write sign here.)  
Sarah J. Acoff  
 (Signature of claimant.)

"Application of Widow for Removal of Charge of Desertion" by Sarah J. Acoff, 15 September 1892, witnessed by Barnhart Hill and Lemuel Tinney. File 10672-B-78, Box 2335, Enlisted Branch Letters Received, 1862–1889, NAID 607910, RG 94, NARA.

files online at the Constitution Society website at <http://www.constitution.org/uslaw/sal/sal.htm>. Some of the volumes can also be found on other websites, including Library of Congress ([memory.loc.gov](http://memory.loc.gov)) and [Legisworks.org](http://Legisworks.org).)

## Alfred Albertz

Alfred Albertz served in Co. D, 1st New York Engineers. The book mark on his jacket, R&P 345981, has a related "Notation" card inside his CMSR that reads: "Record and Pension Office, War Department, Washington, May 18, 1893. It has been determined from evidence before this Department that the true name of this soldier is Alfred Albertz and a discharge certificate as of that name was furnished to his attorney on May 18, 1893, upon application and proof of identity, under the provisions of the act of Congress, approved April 14, 1890. See also Co. C, 8 U.S. Vet. Vols." All the cards inside his CMSR show that Edwin Schelldorf was the name under which he enlisted and served; these cards were annotated by the AGO in 1893 to indicate his true name was Alfred Albertz.

The "Notation" card alerts the researcher to the relevance of the act of 14 April 1890 (26 Stat. 55), that authorized the Secretaries of War and the Navy to issue discharge certificates with the "true name" of a veteran "upon application and proof of identity" to those who have been honorably discharged during the war of the rebellion who had "enlisted or served under assumed names" unless the "name was assumed to cover a crime or to avoid its consequence."

Now let's see what additional information is added by book mark file R&P 345981, which is part of Record and Pension Office Record Cards, 1889–1904 (NAID 588796). It contains three separate packets of paper slips glued together. Each packet is a miniature diary on some part of the AGO's investigation into Albertz's claim that he was Edward Schelldorf. Two comrades, John Richter and Julius Hunt, identified Albertz as Schelldorf in a joint affidavit on 10 September 1892. Two unnamed neighbors, in separate affidavits dated 22 October 1892, also identified

Three paper packets about the true name of Alfred Albertz alias Edwin Schelldorf, filed under R&P 355981, Record and Pension Office Record Cards, 1889–1904 (NAID 588796).

Albertz as Schelldorf. (The affidavits themselves are not in this file.) Albertz himself said he enlisted under an assumed name "to delude his family and for no other reason." Thus, Albertz met the law's requirements and the AGO approved his request.

## Amasa Armstrong

Amasa Armstrong served in Co. I, 1st New York Engineers. The book mark on his jacket, Sno-23-1867, has a related "Notation" card inside his CMSR that reads: "War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Washington, Feb. 1, 1867. 'Having reported to his regiment from desertion, is hereby returned to duty without trial or loss of pay,' by S.O. 194, Par. 2, Hd. Q[uar]ters Dep't of the South, Hilton Head, S.C. July 17, 1865." The company muster-out card also refers to his desertion and this order without giving details of when the desertion occurred.

This "Notation" card points to two records. Department of the South Special Orders No. 194 is found in the Adjutant General's Office Orders and Circulars, 1797–1910 (NAID 654725), volume 424. This order states: "The following named enlisted men, deserters from the 1st N.Y. Vol. Eng's having reported to their regiment, they are hereby returned to duty without trial or loss of pay their absence having been satisfactorily

explained." No further detail is given about this "absence" by Moses J. Ludington, William Decker, Michael Sheehan, Edward Rossman, Richard H. Angel, J. A. Moore, John J. White, Amasa Armstrong, and William Mitchell.

Book mark file Sno-23-1867 is found in Enlisted Branch Letters Received, 1862–1889 (NAID 607910). It contains a copy of Department of the South Special Orders No. 194 and papers noting that two men on the list, Moses J. Ludington and J. A. Moore, could not be found on the muster rolls of that regiment.

### **William Auer**

William Auer served in Co. D, 1st New York Engineers. The book mark on his jacket, 6165-B-(EB) 73, is also noted on the book mark line on the Company Muster-out Roll card inside his CMSR. The company muster out roll was dated at Richmond, Virginia, 30 June 1865, but the remarks indicate "Discharged by Surgeons Certificate of Disability at Tiba Island May 19. [18]62." Although cards in his CMSR refer to his sickness and discharge, there is no medical discharge certificate in the file.

Book mark file 6165-B (EB) 73 is found in Enlisted Branch Letters Received, 1862–1889 (NAID 607910). For unknown reasons, William was not given a discharge certificate when he left the service. Years later, he decided he wanted to have one, so in 1873, he wrote to the War Department to request a discharge certificate. This file and the annotation on the muster-out card resulted from that request and subsequent research showing the circumstances under which he left military service.

### **Research Steps**

As noted earlier in this article, the book mark file is a separate record from the soldier's CMSR, and researchers must contact the National Archives to obtain a copy.

First, examine the soldier's Compiled Military Service Record (CMSR) jacket. If there is anything written on the *Book Mark* line, write down that sequence of letters and numbers

exactly. (If the book mark line is blank, stop; there's no related book mark file.)

Second, examine the rest of the soldier's CMSR. Is there a "Notation" card or some other card in the CMSR itself that references that sequence of letters and numbers? If so, you have now learned the issue and the decision reached.

Third, to read the "book mark" file itself, send your name, mailing address, e-mail address, phone number, and a copy of the CMSR jacket, along with a request such as "I would like a copy of the book mark file [number] for this soldier [name, unit, war]" to Archives I Reference, National Archives and Records Administration, 700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20408, or e-mail this information to [archives1reference@nara.gov](mailto:archives1reference@nara.gov). Researchers may also do this research in person. For more information, see <http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/washington/researcher-info.html>.

### **Final Thoughts**

This discussion has focused on book marks on CMSRs of Union Civil War soldiers. However, book marks can also be found on the CMSR jackets of soldiers of other wars, and should not be ignored. Of course, the issue that caused the creation of the *Book Mark* may also be discussed in the veteran's pension file, so researchers should always thoroughly read that file as well.



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