For those of us who have veterans who served in the First World War, recreating your veteran's WWI service can feel like a daunting task. While it might feel like an uphill battle, the reward is the added insight into your soldier's life, how the war affected your family, and how it impacted society. There are a number of factors that can hinder efficient research. To begin, the internet has been very slow to turn its attention towards WWI research. Luckily, with the 100th anniversary of the U.S. entry into the war approaching in April 2017, a fire has been lit and collections are popping up online monthly. How do you find them? There isn't a one-stop-shopping experience online for WWI military research; you have to know where to look. Further complicating matters, the National Archives Records Personnel Center in St. Louis suffered a devastating fire in 1973, destroying roughly 80% of Army (and Army Air Corps) records from 1912-1960. Related to this is an overall lack of cohesion in federal WWI documentation. The National Archives was founded in 1934 and began receiving records in 1936, well after the end of the First World War. While government agencies adhere to strict retention schedules today, those schedules were not in place in 1936. Some records collections remained with the various governmental agencies and were never turned over to the National Archives. Some of these collections can be found online or requested by mail; others are available for in-house research only. Lastly, there are many layers of government accountability overseeing military endeavors, resulting in multiple places to search for information on the county, state and federal levels. These difficulties aside, you can still discover information about your veteran's service, if you are willing to invest the time, effort, and money into turning over every stone.

Getting Started

The best way to locate your soldier's military record is to start with you. What do you already know? Examine what information you may already have on-hand through your own research and family discussions. Do you have photos that can be enlarged to read the insignia on their uniforms? Are there letters or diaries written by your veteran or other family members that would mention their military service? Once you have evidence that they served, you can then turn to online resources to confirm your findings.

One of the most popular WWI era resources is the U.S. WWI draft registration cards from 1917-1918 available at www.ancestry.com, www.familysearch.org and other websites. These cards can help narrow your soldier down to a particular city when searching for local records, but they won't provide their service history. For many of us, our veteran isn't represented because they enlisted in the military before the first draft on June 5, 1917. Ancestry also has the *U.S., Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963* database. These double-sided application cards include the name, rank, unit, and dates of birth and death for soldiers who received government issued military headstones. Angus McDonald's widow Clara[1]

applied for his headstone on October 4, 1953, three weeks after he died. Her application was approved and his headstone was ordered two months later on December 8th.   If you do not have a subscription

to www.ancestry.com, visit your local library or Family History Center to access Ancestry Library Edition, which also includes these collections.

Another subscription website is www.fold3.com which has digitized millions of pages of military records from the U.S. National Archives. While they have not added many WWI collections, there are two worth noting. The first is the WWI Military Cablegrams-AEF-War Department. This online collection includes over 17,000 pages of cablegrams within the Adjutant General's Office. Based on the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) microfilm series M930; Regular, confidential, and courier cablegrams exchanged between General Headquarters, AEF HQ, and the War Department. The other collection is the U.S. Veterans Administration Pension Payment Card Index. This collection consists of pension payment cards, showing payments made between 1907 and 1933 to members of the Regular Army or Navy digitized from NARA microfilm series M850. These records do not include draftees. For these pensions you can contact the Veterans Administration http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits. You will need a copy of your soldiers Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) to be discussed later.

Additional Online Resources

I typically recommend my clients access as many free websites as they can before they purchase a subscription to a website. Here is a list of some of my favorite free WWI online resources:
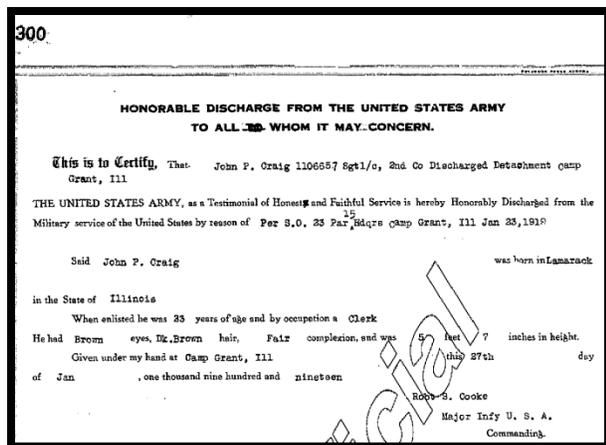
- Internet Archives www.archives.org has several WWI collections available by keyword search: https://archive.org/search.php?query=First%20World%20War. Within this site, some of my most frequently used resources include the *American Legion Collection* which has an extensive run of the American Legion Magazine begun in the spring of 1919[2] https://archive.org/details/americanlegionhq. The *California Digital Collection* https://archive.org/details/cdl&tab=collection includes over three thousand books related to WWI. The *Historical WWI Films Collection* https://archive.org/details/ASC-139 created by the U.S. Army are also worth viewing.

- The University of Wisconsin at Madison Library WWI Collection: https://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/History/WWIColl in conjunction with

- The Milwaukee Public Library's WWI Military Portraits: http://content.mpl.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/WWI

- The United States Military Academy at West Point online map collection: http://content.mpl.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/WWI.

- The American Battle Monuments Commission: https://www.abmc.gov/search/node.

- The World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri has digitized thousands of photographs, diaries, camp newspapers and other relics pertinent to the history of the war. They are consistently listed as one of the top museums in the country and have a robust calendar of events, book signings and lectures. They have an extensive collection of war diaries and unit histories as well as personal collections. If you can't make the trip to view the collections in person, you can search their collections online

https://www.theworldwar.org/explore/online-collections-database. The librarians and archivist are extremely knowledgeable, and welcome research questions.

- The United States National Archives system houses millions of pages of records covering the history of the United States. While they have barely scratched the surface of materials available online, you can benefit from what they have made available already through their online catalog: https://catalog.archives.gov. For example, a search under Record Group 120 using the keyword casualty will bring up 23 collections. If you narrow your search to 'Available Online' you will see 2 digitized collections. The second is for the 7th Division pertaining to Native-American soldiers during the war. Keyword searches will bring up many digitized copies of orders, bulletins, photos and related materials. Recently, the National Archives has been working with Ancestry.com to make their WWI embarkation records available online sometime in 2017.

Local Resources

There are several resources available to you on the local level. Is there a local historical or genealogical society within the community? Societies and museums can offer new avenues of research, but don't be discouraged if their collections are not cataloged down to the individual surname level. Start broadly at first and then begin to narrow your search. Ask if they have records pertaining to the First World War; diaries, welcome home ceremonies, parades, and hero books all may provide service information for your veteran. Ask if the society or museum has records for their local military service organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars or the American Legion or contact those groups directly. Military

service groups required service information to join. Such groups would elect officers every year, as well as host numerous public events throughout the year, creating photo opportunities and generating newspaper reports.

Check with the local library in the communities in which your soldier lived. They might have lists of men and women who served, or newspapers available covering that time span, plus other unique resources. For example the Aurora Public Library in Aurora, Illinois owns a book in their Local History Collection called, "With the Colors from Aurora 1917 1918 1919." It includes lists of men who served from Kane County Illinois and includes hundreds of military service photos. John Perry Craig[3] is listed as a Sergeant 1st Class in the 229th Aero Squadron 2nd Division Aviation Detachment; Verne Foutz[4] is listed as a Private in Company I of the 129th Infantry 33rd Division. Verne died of influenza in April 1918 at Camp Logan, Texas. His death, along with his photo, was announced in the Aurora Beacon news on April 21st 1918[5].

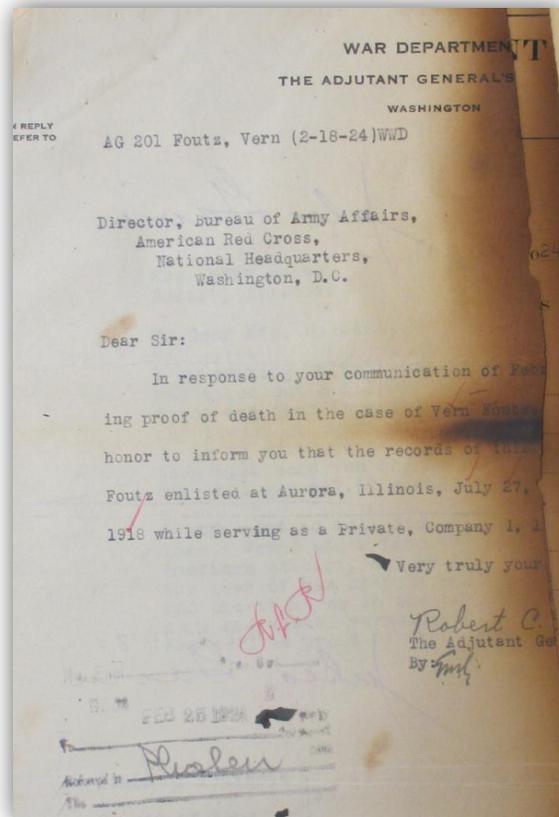Local courthouses are another destination for military information. Returning soldiers would file a copy of their discharge papers at either the County Recorder's Office or the County Clerk's Office. This information will often include their physical description, the unit in which they served, when and where they mustered in and from where they were mustered out. Like hundreds of men, Angus LeRoy

McDonald was discharged from Camp Grant on February 21, 1919 and filed a copy of his discharge papers with the Will County Recorder of Deeds on March 12, 1919[6]. Angus's unit and service matches other military paperwork, but that isn't always the case.

At the end of the war military units were often consolidated to expedite discharge; the unit listed on their discharge papers may not be the unit in which they served during the war. An example is the discharge of John Perry Craig[7] who filed in Kane County on April 16, 1919. His final pay voucher lists him as a member of the 2nd Co. Discharge Detachment from Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. The unit was created in the winter of 1919 to hasten the discharge of the thousands of soldiers who were arriving daily at Camp Grant. Some counties also provided bonuses to returning soldiers. Widows and dependents may have been assisted under the Township or County Overseer of the Poor; those records can reside at the Township Assessor's Office of the County Tax Collector's Office. Check with the County where your soldier lived for possible records.

State Records

Other state agencies could potentially provide information on your WWI soldier; the Adjutant General oversaw all military units with each state. The AG's job was to provide supplies for state units and oversee paperwork pertaining to military orders, supply chains, transfers, discharges and bonuses.

These records are still held in some states by the Adjutant General's office. In other states they may be held by the state's National Guard headquarters or the state archives or library. The state of Michigan has extensive records pertaining to bonuses awarded to returning soldiers. They are accessible at the Archives of Michigan in Lansing. Adjutant General records containing military personnel files for the Iowa National Guard from 1876-1951are housed at the Iowa State Archives in Des Moines.

In Illinois, the Adjutant General's office oversaw Illinois National Guard units, many of which were federalized in 1917. A small percentage of records pertaining to these activated units are still housed at the Illinois National Guard offices in Springfield, IL. After the war ended, the Illinois State Legislature created a bonus system that would pay soldiers based on the number of days they spent in active duty. From 1923-1927 Illinois soldiers could fill out a multi-page application giving their name, unit and additional personal information including date of birth, address both before and after the war, and next of kin. Each soldier's application was assigned a unique number that did not correspond to his military service number. The state would then calculate their bonus based on their military service dates

and award them a check. Parents, widows and dependents could file for their deceased soldier's bonus by submitting the same forms and including the soldier's proof of death.

Sadly, the Illinois State Adjutant General's Office suffered a catastrophic fire in 1934, destroying over 75% of the WWI bonus applications. From that fire, the Illinois State Archives was created and opened its doors in 1938. The salvaged WWI records are housed in the Margaret Cross Norton building in Record Groups 503: *Service Recognition Board: World War I Bonus Applications from Veteran's and Beneficiaries, 1923*-1927. Charles Foutz, father of deceased soldier Verne Foutz, applied for his bonus[8] and his charred papers are available to view at the Illinois State Archives. Record Group 301: *Military and Naval Department: World War I Bonus Correspondence, 1932-1955* are also useful in tracing your veteran's WWI service. The index to WWI bonus applications survived intact and is available on microfilm in the archives research room, but the data on the index cards is sparse.

Federal Records

National Records Personnel Center, St, Louis, MO

Federal records pertaining to the First World War are housed in multiple archives across the United States. The National Records Personnel Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri houses the Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) for soldiers and sailors from 1912 to the present. As mentioned earlier a fire[9] destroyed over 75% of Army records relating to WWI. Luckily, the National Archives has been working to restore the damaged records using 21st century imaging technology and through the addition of extraneous service records such as hospital records and final payment vouchers.
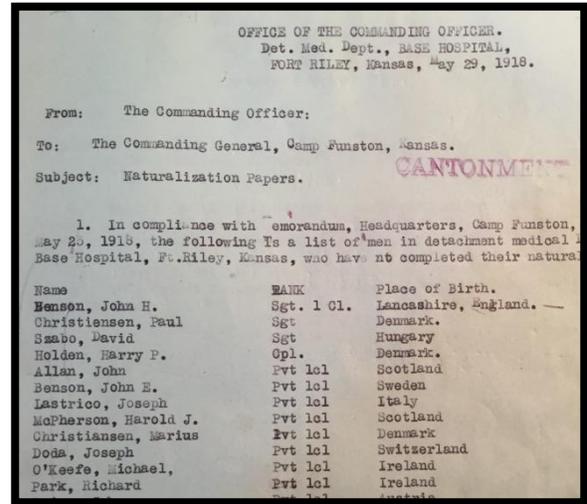
 If you receive a "fire record," take what information is provided and parlay that into additional research at one of the other National Archives facilities. If your veteran died while in active military service, the NPRC has Record Group 92.8.1 "*Burial Case Files in the Records office of the Quartermaster General; Correspondence Reports, telegrams, applications and other papers relating to burial of service personnel 1/1/1915-12/31/1939*." Another record group that could provide information is 153.2.3 *Court-martial case Files and related records 1809-1939*. These include the military testimony and verdict for court martials. There is an index to the records transferred to the NPRC at the National Archives II in College Park, MD. You can contact the Archives by email stlarr.archives@nara.gov to request the form needed to obtain these records.

National Archives at Kansas City, MO

National Archives at Kansas City has records pertaining to medical units, ambulance service, hospital and infirmary records for each of the American Base Sections. These records include general reports for individual hospitals which include some lists of admitted and released soldiers as well as records relating to the treatment of disease and hospital maintenance as overseen by the Section Surgeon. For example records of the Attending Surgeon for Base Section No. 2 are listed as NM-92 2404 within Record Group 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (WWI). There are additional collections in Kansas City as well, such as Motor Transport, Signal Corps and some Provost Marshall records.

National Archives I, Washington D.C.

National Archives I in Washington D.C. maintains Record Group 393: *Records of the U. S. Army Continental Command 1821-1920*. This record group includes all camp records for units stationed within the United States, for example Camp Funston, Kansas or Fort Logan, Texas. These records are arranged

by military base, then by unit. Very few records are indexed down to the surname level; you must know the unit in which your soldier served to effectively navigate these collections. They are beneficial to your research because they include all records for daily camp operations, special orders, memos, correspondences and other records relating to military bases and the units stationed therein. The special orders can be used to track your veteran's promotion or transfer between units as well as approved leaves of absence, furloughs and medical discharges. The most fascinating collection within RG 393 is the Alien Registration Papers[10]. Soldiers who were not U.S. citizens at the time of their enlistment

or draft were offered the opportunity to become U.S. citizens. Lists were compiled by each unit's commanding officer and collated within each military base and camp. If a soldier refused to become a U.S. citizen a deposition was conducted asking the solider why they refused citizenship. Some of these reports include discrimination charges filed by the soldier, as well as discharge orders for those alien soldiers deemed unfit for military service.
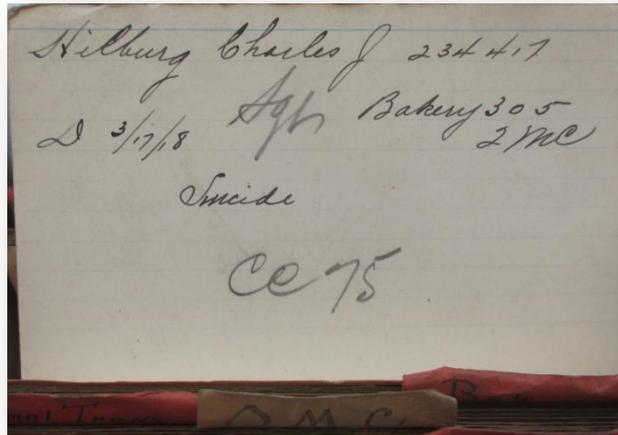
National Archives II, College Park, MD

The National Archives II in College Park, MD has the largest collection of records related to the First World War. Record Group 120: *Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I)* comprises millions of records relating to the military units stationed in Europe during and immediately following WWI. Millions of documents and orders covering every aspect of the war in Europe are housed here including military units stationed in Europe plus Army administration records overseeing each of the base commands.

Records like *Casualty Cablegrams*[11] issued by the War Department include thousands of men and women who were wounded, killed in action or sick from disease or other ailments. These records are compiled by date of filing not by date of wounds received. They are not indexed and are not in order by unit or surname. I recommend you start with the veteran's OMPF. If a hospital record is included, take that hospital admittance date and search near that date to find your soldier listed in the casualty cablegrams.

Another important series to investigate are *the* name files of casualties created by the statistical Division of the War Department under the U.S. Adjutant General's Department between 11/30/1917-8/31/1920. They are listed under NM-91 568-570 and include: *Name Files of Men in the American Expeditionary Forces Reported as Missing in Action or Taken Prisoner; Name Files of the Dead or Severely Wounded in various organizations in the American Expeditionary Forces 1918-1918*; and *Name Files of the Dead or*

Severely Wounded in infantry divisions in the American Expeditionary Forces 1918-1918. These index cards are arranged by unit then alphabetical by surname. They include the soldier's service number, date of casualty, and cause of death if applicable. There are hundreds of cards within this collection of those that perished from the influenza pandemic.

The National Archives II in College Park also has extensive photographic and cartographic collections cross-referenced by location, subject and surname (if known). The photographic collections include photos of units, commanding officers, engineering projects, hospitals, effects of mustard gas on soldiers, prisoners, camp locations, scenes from the front, and so much more. The Library of Congress also has extensive photographic and cartographic collections available to browse on-site including a lengthy list of camp newspapers. Some collections are available online through their catalog https://www.loc.gov/search/?in=&q=World+War+I&new=true such as the Bain Collection https://www.loc.gov/collections/bain including over 1100 photographs taken during the war. Also, the Veterans Oral History Project has nearly 400 interviews and collections for the First World War http://www.loc.gov/vets. You need a research card for each of the National Archives facilities, as well as the Library of Congress. Researcher cards are free. A current photo I.D. is required.

Lessons Learned

My lessons learned while researching at the National Archives. ARC numbers found in the online archival records catalog do not help you when looking through the printed finding aids. If you are going to be doing your research online before going to one of the National Archives facilities, be sure to copy the HMS/MLR Entry Number listed in the online record which will look something like this: NM-81 1942. This number correlates to the printed finding aids which will, in turn, point you to the size and breadth of that particular record group or sub-set. Another important tip, you cannot print the online records from your computer at home; I found that taking a screen shot of the website pages I needed and saving those images preserved the HRS/MLR entry numbers and collection descriptions.

Records must be requested in advance at many of the National Archives facilities. If you are interested in OMPF records you must contact the National Records Personnel Center in advance with the names you are seeking. They will contact you when they have pulled all the records. Only then can you make an appointment to visit St. Louis to view the files. The National Archives I and Archives II pull records several times per day. You are limited to the number of records you can view at any given time. Be sure that you allow yourself ample time to research the records you have requested and build in time for additional research requests that will come up while viewing the documents. You are allowed to bring your own scanning equipment and cameras, but be sure to view their guidelines online for the list of acceptable equipment.

In Summary

As you can see, there are many avenues of research to help you document your veteran's WWI military service. Each search is unique; these are but a small sampling of the types of records that exist. Remember, start with you. What do you have already that can help you identify their military service? Check online to see if you can verify the information you have gleaned from personal records. Ask local resources such as the local library, archives or courthouse; what types of World War I records did they collect? Check with your state archives or library to see if they collected records on military service such as military bonus records or enlistment books. Once you have utilized all pertinent information from local sources, then you can begin delving into the vast number of records housed in one of the National Archives facilities across the country. Don't be discouraged by the immensity of the task. Ask questions; take advantage of the knowledge and expertise that each office and facility offers. Be tenacious. No retreat!

Notes

1. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, *U.S., Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963* (http://www.ancestry.com : accessed 28 December 2016) entry for Angus L. McDonald 1895-1953) Joliet, Illinois.
2. Internet Archives, *American Legion Collection* (https://archive.org/details/americanlegionhq : accessed 26 December 2016).
3. J.W. Greenway, With the Colors from Aurora 1917 1918 1919 Aurora: Eugene Smith Company, 1920, 28.
4. Ibid, 33.
5. *Gave Life for His Country*, Aurora Beacon News, 21 April 1918, p. 6 col. 2.
6. Will County, Illinois, Military Discharge Records, Volume 579:75, Angus LeRoy McDonald, Service no. 813471, Sergeant Supply Co. 45th Regiment C.A.C., discharged 1919, Will County Historical Society, Lockport.
7. Kane County, Illinois, Military Discharge Records, Volume 46:300, John Perry Craig, Service no. 1106657, Sergeant 1st class, discharged 1919; Kane County Recorder of Deeds Office, Geneva.
8. Verne Foutz, 129th Illinois Infantry, RG 503; Service Recognition Board; World War I Bonus Applications from Veteran's and Beneficiaries, 1923-1927; Illinois State Archives, Springfield.
9. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, *The 1973 Fire, National Personnel Records Center*, (https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/fire-1973.html : accessed 29 December 2016).
10. "Alien Enemies Reporting in the July Draft;" Aliens 340th Field Artillery N.A. Camp Funston, July 1917; Alien Papers, 1917-1920; Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920; RG 393; National Archives I, Washington, D.C.
11. "Casualty Cablegram No. 19," AEF General Headquarters, January 24, 1918 p.1; Adjutant General War Department; Washington, D.C. ; Casualty Cablegrams, 1918-1919; Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I); RG 120; National Archives II, College Park, MD.