IN-Genious

INDIANA WORLD WAR II GENEALOGY CAN BE TRICKY
by Ron Darrah

My Uncle Art, Dad’s brother, served in the Army during World War II. We all knew that. He was also wounded at Normandy when he landed there on D-Day. None of us, not even his children, knew that until I discovered it during a records search.

Many veterans are reticent about their military service; they just don’t talk about that stuff. And by now, many World War II veterans are gone and unable to talk, so it may be up to you to discover their military service for your family.

Actually, if you had an Indiana relative who served in World War II, you should hope that (a) they are still alive to interview, and (b) they retained lots of records and memorabilia. If not, you might be fighting an uphill battle yourself.

PRIVACY LAWS

The first obstacle you may run into is the privacy laws. The war ended only 64 years ago, well within the standard 72-year privacy guidelines established for records release. Some clerks and officials enforce this limit and some do not; some records fall into these limits and some do not. In the often bizarre world of government records, it is difficult to find any rhyme or reason as to why things are as they are.

The government, both state and national, has to strike a balance between the Freedom of Information Act (AKA the You-Can-Look-At-Anything Law) and the Privacy Act (AKA the No-You-Can’t Law).

The National Archives website uses the statement, “Information will not be released if requested for unethical purposes.” I was wondering if they get much of that. Do they have a block you can check? Ethical? Unethical?

But all is not lost; records are out there, you can access them, and hopefully you can find information on your family. Let’s take a look at a few Indiana sources available to you.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES PERSONNEL RECORDS

World War II veterans’ records were turned over to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) by the War Department or Department of Defense. It turned out not to be a good move.

In 1973, a huge fire at that St. Louis facility destroyed over eighty percent of the Army records of World Wars I and II, with between sixteen and eighteen million Army records going up in smoke. Cross your fingers and hope that your family went into the Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard!

The losses affected by the eighty percent include the Army records of veterans discharged between November 1, 1912 and January 1, 1960, and Air Force people from 1947 to 1964. As the Archives themselves state, “No duplicate copies of the records were maintained, nor was a microfilm copy ever produced. There were no indexes created prior to the fire.” Not a good situation.
The NPRC staff says they will try to use some alternate sources to give you some information, but I have tried this twice and received nothing in return. They will look at some military pay vouchers and some medical-related records to see what is there. Ironically, they regularly contact the Indiana State Archives to tap into our Discharge Certificate file (see *State Archives Discharge Certificates* later in this article) and other data sets to answer queries.

So, you can try to see if your Indiana folks are Navy, Coast Guard, or Marine Corps, or in the twenty percent of surviving Army records. Maybe, if you’re lucky, the NPRC can recreate some data.

Take an on-line look at this situation at http://archives.gov.

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES ENLISTMENT RECORDS**

The National Archives website (Archives.gov), in their *Access to Archival Databases* section, contains this searchable database of approximately nine million men and women, including Hoosiers, who enlisted in the U. S. Army between 1938 and 1946. It includes the Women’s Army Corps. It does not include Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard personnel, nor does it include officers of any kind.

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### Display Full Records

**File Unit:** Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 - 1946 (*Enlistment Records*)  
**in the Series:** World War II Army Enlistment Records, created 6/1/2002 - 9/30/2002, documenting the period ca. 1938 - 1946. - Record Group 64 (*info*)

**Brief Scope:** This series contains records of approximately nine million men and women who enlisted in the United States Army, including the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps.

You may wish to View the FAQs for this series.

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*National Archives Enlistment Record Sample*
The file is a reconstruction that involved a conversion of old data processing punch cards (remember those?), and is actually a third-hand project, as the Army microfilmed the punch cards (have you ever heard of an idea like that?), then destroyed the cards themselves. This data was keyed from reading microfilmed punch cards!

The twenty-six data fields in this database include name, serial number, state, dates, and various additional information. Some of the fields are blank due to card reading problems.

The database does not include everyone, but it’s a good starting point. There is a smaller database that has about three hundred thousand members of the Reserve Corps. This collection is also at Ancestry.com.

The display looks like the illustration on the previous page. Several fields are always blank.

**ANCESTRY DRAFT REGISTRATION CARDS**

On Ancestry.com you will find a searchable database of the Fourth Registration draft held in 1942. This registration is commonly known as the “Old Man’s Draft,” since it was for older men, those born between April 28, 1877, and February 16, 1897. These men were between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four at the time. The government in 1942 felt that we were going to need to scrape the bottom of the barrel and wanted to know where that bottom was.

Indiana is one of seventeen states in the database, but it is listed as “incomplete.” Ancestry does not have all the cards for Indiana yet, so do not be surprised if you don’t find your subject.

We are more fortunate than eight Southern states, whose cards were trashed before microfilming. They are gone forever.

The original draft cards for Indiana, the complete set, are in the National Archives Great Lakes Region in Chicago, so you may have to go there to find your guy. The other World War II draft records for the U. S. have not yet been released.

About ten data fields and sometimes a few more are on the cards, which are very similar to the World War I version. If you don’t have Ancestry at home, you can use it at the State Library, the Allen County Public Library, and numerous other libraries throughout the state. The State Library also has a microfilm version on the second floor. Ancestry also has several smaller World War II databases in their collection.

The card on the next page is for my grandfather. I’m glad he didn’t have to go!

**STATE ARCHIVES INDIANA WORLD WAR II BONUS MICROFILM**

In March 1949, the State Legislature of Indiana, after the citizens approved a referendum, awarded a bonus to any Hoosier military veteran who served at least thirty days in the military between December 7, 1941, and November 2, 1945.

Veterans received $10 for each month of service in the U.S. and $15 for each month overseas with a minimum of $30 and a maximum of $600. The next of kin of veterans who died while in the service received the maximum of $600. Disabled veterans also received the maximum.

Veterans had to fill out an application form, which was later destroyed, and present a copy of their Discharge form (see State Archives Discharge Certificates later in this article) to claim the bonus. About the only thing to survive from
This process are some microfilmed index cards in the State Archives.

The Archives has sixty-three rolls of 16 mm film, titled “Alphabetical Index to WW2 Bonus Applications,” evidently prepared by the Auditor of the State. These cards, since destroyed, and the film contain names, addresses, bonus application numbers, military serial numbers, and county of enlistment. A few cards have handwritten address updates. A warning: the filming is terrible and many cards are so fuzzy that they are nearly illegible.

A second small series of eight films contain information on deceased veterans. Three rolls have an alphabetical index by veteran, three rolls have an alphabetical index by next of kin, and two rolls have a numerical index by bonus number. Most of these are also fuzzy, except for the numerical index. (Someone wore their new glasses that day!) I would advise finding the bonus number on the fuzzy film and then using the numerical set to make copies.

These cards do not contain a great amount of information, but sometimes a little is better than nothing. Much more information would be available if the state had not trashed the applications themselves. (Don’t cha love Indiana!)

All the versions are essentially like this one.
INDIANA WORLD WAR II GENEALOGY CAN BE TRICKY (continued)

Discharge
STATE ARCHIVES DISCHARGE CERTIFICATES

For the benefit of the non-veterans among us, a military member receives a Separation Document when he/she is discharged from military service. Today this is a DD-214 form; in World War II it was a WD AGO Form 53 and 55. (War Department and Adjutant General’s Office)

The face of the AGO form was a certificate of Honorable Discharge and a thank you for faithful service. The back of the form was a detailed short history of the veteran’s military service. It contained fifty-seven data fields with a tremendous quantity of information. (See previous page.) If you have a military member in your family, ask to see their WD or DD form.

Now for the bad part. When Indiana passed the World War II Bonus Act, veterans had to provide a copy of their AGO certificate to the Adjutant General’s Office in order to claim the bonus. These copies were later turned over to the Indiana State Archives, where they reside today, about four hundred thousand of them. Access to these AGO records is extremely limited, thanks to Indiana’s House Enrolled Act 1546, effective on May 14, 2007. This law restricts access to the veteran, next-of-kin, and certain other persons. Since it has no time limit, evidently the restriction lasts forever. (Don’t cha really love Indiana!)

So, like I said originally, ask around and hope your Grandpa still has his certificate somewhere.

I found my Dad’s certificate (see the previous page) in a courthouse in West Virginia.

STATE ARCHIVES CASUALTIES FILE

This is an alphabetical card file of Indiana Army and Navy casualties that includes name, rank, next of kin, date of wounds, and theater of military action.

This collection is eleven boxes of 3” x 5” cards, each box twelve inches long. The cards are a mixture of typed and handwritten copy and were evidently prepared by the Indiana Historical Bureau. The data was extracted from a variety of newspaper and military sources.

There is a separate two-box index for Marion County residents. (I do not know why Marion County has a separate index.) This collection looks like a highly usable source.

There are lots of handwritten updates on these cards.
STATE LIBRARY WW II SERVICEMEN DATABASE

From 1942 to 1946 the Indiana State Library librarians indexed the three Indianapolis newspapers, Star, News, and Times, for notices of casualties, MIA’s, prisoners, and decorations. They created a card file index, and this online version was developed from that.

The search screen only gives you the newspaper reference, not the actual article. For that you have to go to the newspaper microfilm and look it up. You can also write to the Library and they will copy it for you. Oddly enough, when I extracted a sample to use for this article, it turned out to be wrong!

The database displays the result screen above.

The sample I looked up had Bower instead of Bowen! Beware of indexes!!

**INDIANA WORLD WAR II GENEALOGY CAN BE TRICKY** (continued)
ADDITIONAL WORLD WAR II RESEARCH

1. Veterans Service Organizations: Up until recently, World War II veterans comprised the bulk of the membership of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, and other such groups. All of these required a membership application that you may be able to access. Response to your queries may be spotty, so be prepared for that.

2. Veterans History Project: This program by the Library of Congress collects audio, video, and print media from veterans of all kinds. Your guy might have submitted something, so check it out on their website at http://www.loc.gov/index.html.

3. Veterans Administration: The VA might have something that is still in their hands and not with the National Archives. They also operate the National Cemetery system with a search program that can locate burials all over the country. Visit them at http://www.va.gov/.

4. American Battle Monuments Commission: This group operates American military cemeteries outside the U.S., and they also have a worldwide grave site locator.

5. Military History Institute: This U.S. Army facility in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, is a good source for Army materials, and I have had very good results from them.

6. Local Newspapers: As you can imagine, the war earned major coverage in Hoosier newspapers, and local servicemen and women were featured prominently. After you pin down some service dates, check the hometown papers for articles. This is the only place where privates and corporals rated coverage equal to General Patton. (And wouldn’t he have hated that!)

7. Historians and Biographers: As you are well aware, World War II was heavily documented, and there are vast numbers of books, films, documents, reports, photographs, manuscript collections, and other materials available on that conflict.

Use your family resources and the above collections to narrow your search to an individual, serial number, theater of operation, and military unit. After that, locate specialized items that pertain to those specific areas. Go find your members of The Greatest Generation!

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

VERSAILLES PIONEER IS DEAD
Submitted by Meredith Thompson

Indianapolis Star, Wednesday, February 26, 1919—page 13, column 3

EVANSVILLE, Ind., Feb. 25—Mrs. Ernestina Beer, 90 years old, widow of Robert F. Beer, died here today at the home of her daughter, Mrs. John Bushing. She was a native of Saxony, Germany. She and her husband came to Versailles in 1857. The surviving children are Otto C. Bushing of Sunman, Ind.; A.H. Beer, Versailles; R.J. Beer, Osgood, Ind.; Edward Beer, Rushville, Ind.; Mrs. John Bushing, Versailles, and Mrs. Anna Avery, Covington, Ky.