

**GENEALOGICAL TREASURES IN
MILITARY AND VETERAN ADMINISTRATION PENSION FILES**

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INTRODUCTION:

When one opens a military or Veteran Administration (VA) pension file, there are service books, unit citations and various other papers related to the serviceman/woman's time served. But for a genealogist, this file can be a treasure chest of other paperwork containing unexpected information on their ancestors.

MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES:

Marriage certificates are a great source of maiden names of wives and finding both sets of parents' names. Siblings might be listed as witnesses at the wedding ceremony. A church or other location mentioned can lead one onto researching church records or where a family lived.

DIVORCE PAPERWORK:

In the case of divorce, the military liked to have the court papers, if possible, in the file to discontinue payments to the ex-spouse. Letters from both sides showing their reasons for the divorce can be found. Determining custody of the children discussed gives more names for family trees. Be prepared to read some tough words from your relatives.

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BIRTH CERTIFICATES:

Birth certificates can come in all shapes and sizes, depending what state you are dealing with, and how much information that state provides. You might be lucky if one is foreign born, to find their certificate, too.

BAPTISMAL/CHRISTENING CERTIFICATES:

These types of certificates give clues of what church the family went to (church records) and possible birth town. Witnesses or sponsors listed might be a family member to investigate.

GUARDIANSHIP:

Who might you have thought was the service member's parent, was instead their guardian? Documents might explain the reasons why the guardian had custody due to family dynamics.

SCHOOL RECORDS:

So, was your ancestor the intellectual you thought they were? If you are lucky, there might be a report card from their high school, or a college transcript. Along with those pieces of paper might be a recommendation from a principal, teacher, or college faculty member. Or is there a notation their education was cut short, and they joined the service?

EMPLOYMENT:

My ancestor did what? Yes, unexpected jobs might appear in application form, military punch card or a job reference letter. Perhaps the service member themselves explained what they had done for a living before joining the service, or what they planned to do when they got out.

SPORTS:

Check to see what involvements in teams your service member had in high school or college. Or perhaps they were a professional athlete.

HOBBIES:

Besides sports, you might find out where that musical talent of singing and dancing was passed down. Or unexpected hobbies of a relative.

LETTERS:

Letters are a prized possession in files. It can be a clue of what the family life was like, before and during the war. The love of a sweetheart across the miles.

Letters can also be signed by someone famous.

PHOTOS:

Photos can give a face to your ancestor. You might see Uncle George in your eyes, or Aunt Mary in her hair. Or it might bring tears to your eyes.

DEATH:

Death can come in many forms in a file. Official government documents record the causes. There might be a death certificate of a family member. Insurance papers or wills can list beneficiaries related to military member. A burial case file might not only have information of the service member, but perhaps a Gold Star mother and her paperwork.

VETERAN ADMINISTRATION PENSION FILE:

Pension files cover time periods that most likely do not have a regular service file, like the Civil War. While requesting a Civil War file, you might find out why a service member's name was changed, a christening paper, or be able to trace his path in the war.

Papers found in military files, such as marriage licenses, wills, and family listings can be found, too.

VA pension files are split between NARA-St. Louis, NARA-Washington DC, and the VA FOIA office.

CONCLUSION:

Do not think of a military or VA personnel file for only its military aspect, but for hidden, unexpected genealogy treasures.

Information provided in this talk provided by the military and pension files provided by NARA-St. Louis.