Expanding World War II Military Service With Digitized Books, Records, and Archival Collections
Jennifer Holik guides you on how to reconstruct military service through many other web-related resources

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU STARTED YOUR WORLD WAR II research and are ready to explore more advanced resources. Have you begun to navigate the spiderweb of Internet resources? Did you snare a great book or record collection in your web?

Online Research Summary
http://jenniferholik.com
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Date	Name of Website with URL or other Source with Author and Publishing Date	Notes

Keep your website research in an online research log. To help you with your research, download the author's Online Research Summary form located at *http://bit.ly/1dZafj7*.

Reconstructing military service and a soldier's story requires more than obtaining the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF.) Or, if the soldier died or is still considered missing, the Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF.)

There are many online sources you should consult for further details about service, especially when researching the collaterals. The collaterals are the people who served with your soldier. Two of the most important online sources are digitized books and records. If you missed my article, or need a refresher on navigating commonly used online World War II records, please see the June/July issue of Internet Genealogy.

Navigating the Spiderweb
Searching the internet for World War II resources is similar to navigating a spiderweb. Everything is connected, but if you are not careful, you can lose your way. Sometimes losing your way is a good thing because you stumble upon resources you might not otherwise have discovered. To help you navigate the spiderweb, track where you have been and what you discovered, it isn't enough to just bookmark a site or online book you discover. Bookmarks can be lost or forgotten. Instead, keep your website research in an online research log. To help you with your research, download my Online Research Summary form at *http://bit.ly/1dZafj7*. Alternatively, you can use the template I created and make an Excel spreadsheet which allows you more room to take notes.

Are you ready to begin traveling the spiderweb?

A Note About Search Terms and Results

It is important to try different search terms when you research your soldier, his unit, a battle, or are looking for something specific. For example, we are looking for information on David Rosenkrantz of I Company, 3rd

David Rosenkrantz in his Paratrooper uniform. (Photo used with permission of Phillip Rosenkrantz)

Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 82nd Airborne Division. You could try: David Rosenkrantz WWII or Rosenkrantz 504th PIR or 82nd Airborne history or 504th PIR history or 504th After Action Reports. Each of those search terms will usually display different results.

Also search beyond the first one or two pages of results. You may discover websites with a lot of information that were not SEO'd well, therefore, do not appear in the top search result rankings. And finally, try different search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Bing) because each has a different formula for ranking websites.

Individual and Unit Research Websites

Genealogists often refer to the "go-to" websites of official archives and libraries when conducting research. Often overlooked are websites created to honor individuals or units. These websites may or may not cite all the sources from which they obtained information, but they provide a starting point. Emailing the website owner may also create a relationship through which you can share information and ask questions.

First try Googling the name *David Rosenkrantz*. As of the time I write this article, a website about

him appears at the top of the search results: *www.cpp.edu/~rosenkrantz/paratroop/sgtdave.htm*. David's nephew created it through his university professor profile, a page dedicated to David Rosenkrantz's service in World War II. He has included photos, stories, links to books, letters, images, and records relating to David's service and the 82nd Airborne.

Next, search for *504th PIR WWII*. One of the top search results is the website for The 82nd Airborne in World War II: *ww2-airborne.us/units/504/504.html*. This website provides a lot of information regarding service of the 504th PIR, but also the entire 82nd Airborne. These details can add a lot of historical context to your research.

Using Facebook for some of my research, especially networking with others who conduct WWII research in Europe, I am often referred to personal websites. For example, the Dutch historian and author, Frank van Lunteren, and I

The 82nd Airborne website provides researchers with access to scanned military documents, photographs, histories, and additional resources. (Screenshot courtesy of the author)

connected through others on Facebook researching WWII. Frank specializes his research in Operation Market Garden and the 504th PIR of which David Rosenkrantz was a member.
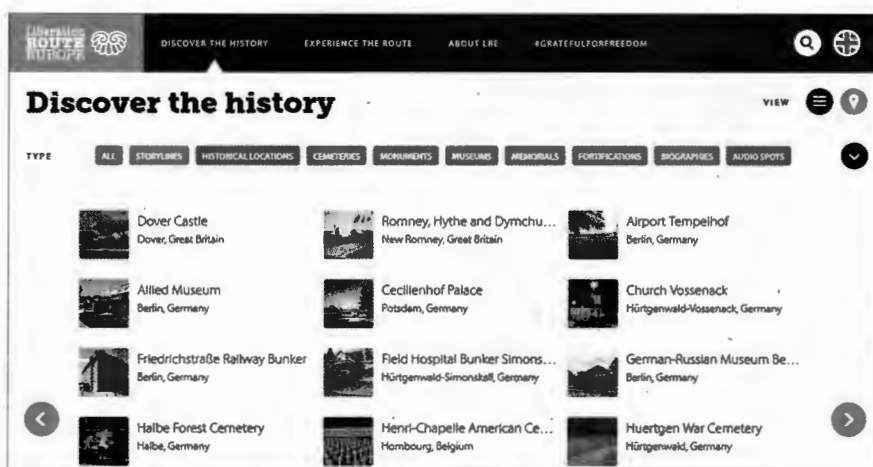
Frank created a website in English, dedicated to his research of the 504th. His website contains history of the 504th PIR, biographies, photos, Order of Battle information, forums, and a veteran's questionnaire. Those are only a few of the resources he offers. See them at *http://freewebs.com/tucker stroopers*.

Add Historical Context to Your Research

Before we explore strands of the web which lead us to digitized books, let's stop for a moment and consider online resources which add historical context to our research. After creating a service history timeline and understanding where the soldier served, before locating online records, researchers should put the history into context.

Some online resources may not provide digitized records. They may provide maps, photographs, and context to people, battles, and places, important in the war effort. Frank van Lunteren's website is a good example of additional resources to place your soldier into historical context. Another example is the Liberation Route Europe website, *http://liberationroute.com.*

On this website, you can Discover the History, Experience the Route, and express your gratitude to the liberators. When you select Discover the History and choose Storylines, numerous options are presented to learn about specific battles. Selecting Operation Market Garden, if you had an Airborne ancestor who dropped

Discover the History of the Liberation Route through Europe by choosing any of the topics across the top of the website to view specific interests. (Screenshot courtesy of the author)

into the area, will give you a brief background on the battle. Images and a map are also shown with additional resources.

If you are considering traveling Europe to see where your ancestor fought, explore the Experience the Route section and its many options. Provided in this section are names of tour guides, sample itineraries, and assistance with lodging and events.

With the soldier placed into historical context, you are now ready to investigate online books to help fill out his story. Online books range in content from Training and Field Manuals to Division Histories and other official Military publications now in the public domain. With so many digitized books online, you no longer have to request so many books through inter-library loan. When you see an older book you are interested in, search for it in digitized book websites.
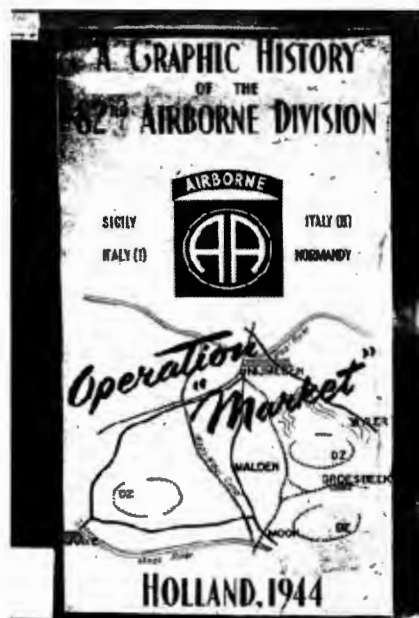
INTERNET ARCHIVE

http://archive.org

Internet Archive is a free website with millions of curated works brought together in the public domain. You will find books, record sets, music, and film within the

walls of the archive. The digitized books allow you to download in various formats from Epub to full text and PDF.

As with other online databases and archives of this type, there are some tricks to locating information. Searching for *World War II 82nd Airborne division* will yield several results, while using the terms *World War II 82nd Airborne division history* yields one result at the time of this writing. Search different combinations of words

The cover of the digitized version of the 15 page, 1944 book, *A Graphic History of the 82nd Airborne.* (Screenshot courtesy of the author)
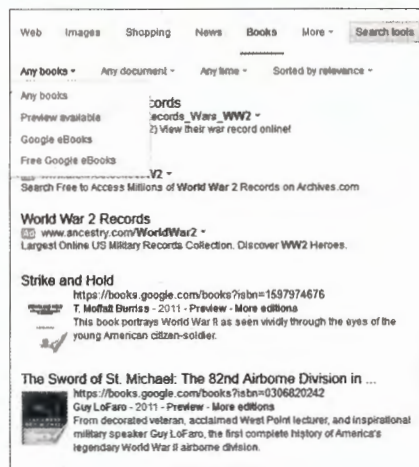
to locate the most information.

Now search for the book *A Graphic History of the 82nd Airborne*. Researchers can use this book to learn additional details about the overall service of the 82nd Airborne during Operation Market Garden and the 504th PIR. The book provides details as to time of parachute jump and mission with times and strength of the enemy. All of these "smaller" details make a soldier's story more interesting because we know where he was at a given point in time.

GOOGLE BOOKS

http://books.google.com

Google Books functions differently than Internet Archive in that books are displayed in full-text, partial-text, and no-text. To effectively search Google Books, enter a search term and see what appears. The results will indicate if a preview for the book exists. If you only wish to see full-text books, you can use the Search Tools at the top of the page to refine the search.

If you locate a book through Google Book searches which is preview only, see if it exists in

Use the Search Tools option in Google Books to refine your search for the type of book preview you wish to see.

full-text on Internet Archive, if it is old enough and likely in public domain. If not, you can try obtaining a copy through interlibrary loan.

FAMILYSEARCH ONLINE BOOKS

http://bit.ly/1xGAnrl

FamilySearch has digitized genealogical records from all over the world, and provides researchers with access to more than 150,000 books through its own library and partner libraries. Partner libraries include:

- Allen County Public Library

- Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library

- Brigham Young University Idaho David O. McKay Library

- Brigham Young University Hawaii Joseph F. Smith Library

- Church History Library

- Family History Library

- Houston Public Library - Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research

- Mid-Continent Public Library - Midwest Genealogy Center

- Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Onondaga County Public Library.

Use the Search function to locate books with the subject World War II. The book results can be sorted by material type, collection, language (in 18 languages, as of the date of this article), and author/creator. The search results also provide additional subjects related to World War II that you can view.

If you select the author/creator United States War Department,

one of the results will be the *Handbook on German Identification*. This book was published in 1943 by the War Department and contained everything a US soldier needed to know to identify a German soldier of any rank or branch. Can you imagine having to learn not only your job within the military, but also how to identify every piece of equipment, uniform, and military issued effects for the enemy?

Official Military Websites

The military branches of the United States have numerous websites dedicated to an overall branch, a specific unit, or area of service, like the Medical Department. When you visit the U.S. Army Office of Medical History website, *http://history.amedd.army.mil/books.html*, you are greeted with a wealth of information. This site allows you to research using digital books containing procedures and histories of units in not only World War II, but through all conflicts.

Related to Military websites like the Medical Department are individual sites which specialize in a division or area. The WW2 US Medical Research Centre, *www.med-dept.com* is run by a couple of European men interested in the American medical department and Graves Registration Units. The site contains downloadable books, an extensive listing of articles, photographs, and histories of units.

I have personally used the WW2 US Medical Research Centre site many times for my Graves Registration Service research. It is the most comprehensive site I've discovered so far for medical and graves registration information. Researchers can use information gathered from the

U.S. Army Medical Department site and supplement that with what can be found on sites like the WW2 US Medical Research Centre.
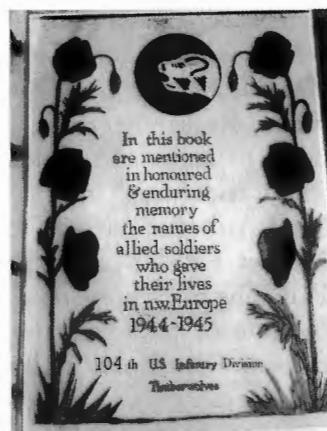
Museum Digital Archives

Our final look at Digital Research Resources are Military Museums. Museums are an often overlooked resource for research and history. In the US, we have access to a variety of military museums, many with digital archives or finding aids to help researchers navigate paper collections. In Europe, many of the World War II museums are smaller with small budgets. Lower budgets often mean materials are not digitized or information about their collection will not appear on their website. In cases where you cannot find information, contact the museum and inquire.

In the US, The National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Ohio, has a research center which is separate from the museum. Their website does not make it easy for a researcher to learn what the archives hold. And in the Research Policy section of the website, the wording makes it clear only certain research requests will be allowed. It goes on to say that due to the location of the research center, on a secure Air Force base, in times of heightened security, the center will be closed to visitors. Proceed at your own risk.

You can learn more on their website:
www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/ Collections/Research.aspx

In Europe, The National Liberation Museum in Groesbeek, Netherlands is an example many may overlook because the website is in Dutch, with language translations. Many European websites

Images from the binders of men who fought and died in the Groesbeek, Netherlands area during World War II. (Photo courtesy of the author)

allow you to read them in different languages so do not let that stop you from investigating these resources. The museum has three digital archive collections: Collectie Gelderland, NIOD Photo Database, and Nijmegen: 'More Than a Human.' The entire website, even parts that may not translate, with the help of Google Translate, can be used.

You can also contact the museum and ask for assistance. I spoke to the curator about researching there on my next trip to the Netherlands, the day I present a program on researching US WWII Records there. The curator told me they have a database in their library which holds information about their collection. He went on to say they have a large collection of war-time materials from locals in the form of diaries, letters, and photographs. There are also volunteers to assist me with my work because I do not speak Dutch. Exactly how many resources are available in English is unknown, but I will be asking.

Finally, in the chapel of the museum, which is circular shaped, there are binders which contain short histories of units and the names of all men in the American, British, Canadian, Polish, and Dutch forces who died in the area

during the war. These binders are broken down by unit with a short history provided and lists of those who died, protected in plastic sleeves.

Closing Thoughts

There are so many layers to the research we can do for our World War II ancestor. Using offline paper records and online digitized books, photographs, maps, and records, we can create a story for our soldier's service in just months, which would have taken years in the past. This article touches on the tip of the iceberg for what is available online. As you have seen through the examples shown, there are different ways to search for information by search terms, how we refine and filter the results, and how we approach locating information. I encourage you to try every possibility and connect with as many other World War II researchers as possible as you continue your research journey through the web. 🌐

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