

## **Ask Ancestry Anne: Why Can't I Find My World War II Veterans Records?**

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A question we hear a lot is: "I've searched and searched, but I can't find records of my grandfather's service in WWII. Am I doing something wrong?" Same for WWI, Korean War and Vietnam War records.

You probably aren't doing anything wrong. There's a good chance the records may still be private or they may have been destroyed in a fire.

### **Privacy for Veterans**

Veterans' records are not accessible to the public until 62 years after the veteran has separated from the service. So if your veteran was still in the service after 1952, only he or she or an authorized person can access that veteran's Official Military Personnel File (OMPF). You can learn more about these veterans and obtaining their records from the National Archives' article, "[Access to Official Military Personnel Files \(OMPF\) – for the General Public.](#)"

If your veteran separated from the service before 1953, which includes most from WWII and earlier conflicts, you can have access to their Official Military Personnel File. For more on access to these files at NARA, which are not available digitally at this time, you should take a look at NARA's "[Official Military Personnel Files \(OMPF\), Archival Holdings.](#)"

## Disastrous Fire at the Military Personnel Record Center in St. Louis

Federal military records starting with WWI are kept at the Military Personnel Record Center. Then on [July 12, 1973](#) there was a fire:



*Southern Illinoian*, 13 July 1973, page 1. Accessed on [Newspapers.com](#).

Not all records were lost, but it is estimated that over 80 percent of Army records for personnel discharged between 1912 and 1960 were destroyed and 75 percent of the Air Force records for those who were discharged between 1947 and 1964 were. No Navy, Marine, or Coast Guard records were lost. "[The 1973 Fire, National Personnel Records Center](#)" gives more information on what was lost, what happened during the fire, and the work being done to preserve and recover what was left.