

# RESEARCHING MILITARY HISTORY



Researching the military history of an ancestor or a military unit can be challenging and rewarding. Numerous information sources and record repositories exist to help you with your research.

While the Texas Historical Commission (THC) does not maintain military records or related archives, the agency has a Military Sites Program that coordinates preservation efforts at properties associated with Texas military history, both inside and outside the state. Agency programs focus on the identification, protection, restoration, interpretation and commemoration of such sites.



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

*Texas Civil War monument,  
Vicksburg National Military Park,  
Vicksburg, Mississippi*

For specific information on battles, campaigns, units and individual military careers, the following sources are recommended. They are divided into two sections: military personnel resources and general historical sources.

## **MILITARY PERSONNEL RESOURCES**

### **Texas State Library and Archives Commission**

Lorenzo de Zavala Building  
P.O. Box 12927, Austin, TX 78711  
Archives Division: 512/463-5480  
Genealogy Collection: 512/463-5463  
[www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/genfirst.html](http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/genfirst.html)

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission, located in the Lorenzo de Zavala Building just east of the Capitol in Austin, houses numerous military records, including information on individuals who served in the Republic of Texas Army and Navy, the Texas Rangers and frontier forces, Confederate States Army, Civil War-era home guard units and soldiers who served in the Spanish American War. (Information on individuals who served in the Mexican War can be found at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.). State library staff can assist patrons either in person or by mail. If conducting research by mail, request the necessary forms, fill them out as completely as possible and return them to library staff, who will conduct the search.

Available at the library for a minimal charge and on the library's web site for free is a resource entitled "Guide to Genealogical Resources in the Texas State Archives," which can be helpful for military records searches. In the library's Genealogy Collection, researchers can scan a microfilm index to Confederate military service records that are held at the National Archives. At the library's web site [www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/genfirst.html](http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/genfirst.html), researchers can search an index of Confederate pension records. The Archives Division is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. The Genealogy Collection is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Information regarding direction to the State Library and Archives building, parking options and a helpful map are all available on the library's web site.

### **General Land Office Archives and Records Division**

Stephen F. Austin Building  
1700 N. Congress, Suite 840, Austin, TX 78701  
512/463-5277  
[www.glo.state.tx.us/central/archives.html](http://www.glo.state.tx.us/central/archives.html)

The General Land Office, located two blocks north of the Texas Capitol in the Stephen F. Austin State Office Building, contains records of land grants awarded for military service to Republic of Texas and Confederate soldiers. For questions about land grant records, contact the Archives and Records Division, 512/463-5277. The Archives Research Room is open from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

### **Adjutant General's Department**

Camp Mabry Library, Building 34  
P.O. Box 5218, Austin, TX 78768  
512/465-5017

The Department of the Adjutant General, located at Camp Mabry in Austin, houses records of the Texas National Guard, as well as records of the 36th Division (World War I). The library is located in Building 34 at Camp Mabry, which is located along W. 35th Street, just west of Mopac (Loop 1). For more information regarding hours of operation and research assistance, call 512/465-5017. While at Camp Mabry, be sure to visit the Texas Military Forces Museum, which features dioramas, aircraft, weapons and vehicles. Open 2 to 6 p.m., Wednesday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday through Sunday. For information, call 512/406-6967.

### **The Harold B. Simpson Research Center**

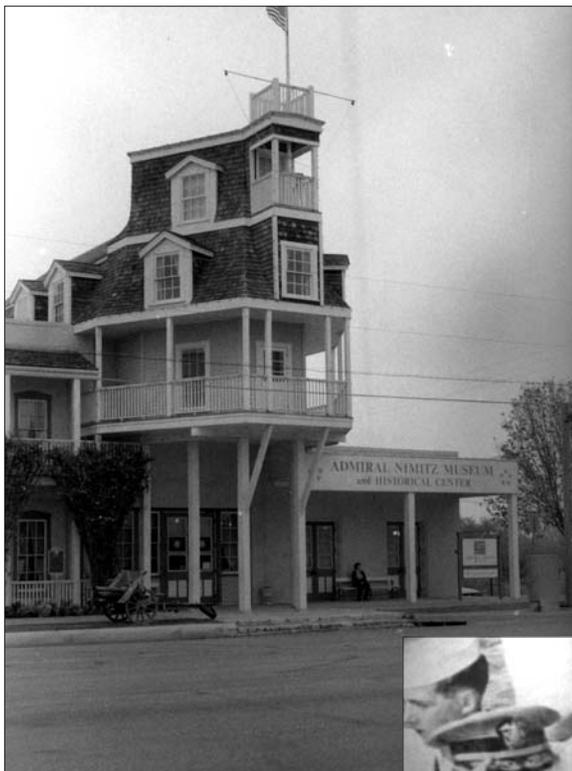
Hill College  
P.O. Box 619, Hillsboro, TX 76645  
254/582-2555, ext. 242

The Harold B. Simpson Research Center, located on the campus of Hill College in Hillsboro, has one of the most extensive libraries in the southwest that focuses on the Civil War. The center includes a collection of more than 5,000 volumes on the war and an extensive archive that includes original manuscripts, diaries and letters. The center houses a microfilm library with 6,000 service records of Hood's Texas Brigade and census reports of Central Texas counties. Another Hill College attraction, the Texas Heritage Museum, houses Civil War exhibits, the Audie L. Murphy Gun Museum and collections of World War I and World War II memorabilia.

**Military Service Records  
National Archives and Records Administration**

National Archives Building  
700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20408-0001  
[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has complete pre-World War I military service records. NARA staff recommend beginning in Room 400, the Microfilm Reading Room, located in the National Archives Building. Paper copies of Civil War military-service and pension records can be ordered by mail using one NATF Form 80 for each soldier and each type of file. The NATF Form 80 can be obtained by sending your name and mailing address by e-mail to [inquire@nara.gov](mailto:inquire@nara.gov). The forms can also be requested by writing to: National Archives and Records Administration, Attn: NWDT1, 700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20408-0001. The NARA Internet web site at [www.nara.gov](http://www.nara.gov) contains extensive information on National Archives resources.



*The National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg offers visitors a fascinating exploration of World War II.*



**National Personnel Records Center  
Military Personnel Records**  
9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100  
314/538-4246

[www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel](http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel)

The National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, contains millions of military personnel, health and medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services who served during the 20th century. Information is available through written requests, as long as requests do not violate privacy laws. Request forms may be received by calling the following records information lines:

- Air Force: 800/525-0102, ext. 71388
- Army: 800/318-5298
- Navy: 866/827-5672
- Marine Corps: 800/268-3710
- Coast Guard: 202/493-1661

Callers will be asked to leave their name and mailing address to receive information request forms. Form requests can also be faxed to 314/538-4175. Faxed requests must be signed and dated.

Center staff recommend that information requests be sent on Standard Form (SF) 180, Request Pertaining to Military Records, which can be downloaded or printed from the center's web site [www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/standard-form-180.html](http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/standard-form-180.html). Questions about information contained in military personnel records may be sent by e-mail to [center@stlouis.nara.gov](mailto:center@stlouis.nara.gov). The center in St. Louis is open between 7:30 a.m. and 3:45 p.m. Monday through Friday. In 1973, a fire at the center destroyed approximately 16-18 million Official Military Personnel Files. More information about the fire can be found at the center's web site: [www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel](http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel).

## GENERAL HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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**Public and university libraries** maintain extensive collections of reference materials on military history. General resources for Texas researchers include: the *New Handbook of Texas* (1996), online at [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/), published by the Texas State Historical Association, and journals such as the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, the *East Texas Historical Journal*, *Military History of the West* and the *West Texas Historical Journal*. Numerous reference volumes covering various periods of history exist; ask your librarian for assistance.

The **Internet** has become a convenient resource for research and information. General Internet reference sources include web sites for each branch of the U.S. military:

- Army: [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil)
- Air Force: [www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil)
- Navy: [www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil)
- Marine Corps: [www.usmc.mil](http://www.usmc.mil)
- National Guard: [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil)
- Coast Guard: [www.uscg.mil](http://www.uscg.mil)

Sites that focus on specific military history include:

- Army Center of Military History: [www.army.mil/cmh-pg](http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg)
- Army Military History Institute: [carlisle-www.army.mil/usamhi](http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usamhi)
- Air Force Historical Research Agency: [www.au.af.mil/au/afhra](http://www.au.af.mil/au/afhra)
- Naval Historical Center: [www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil)

Other interesting historical web sites include:

- E-Hawk - Home of the Military History Timeline: [www.e-hawk.com](http://www.e-hawk.com)
- Library of Congress: [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)
- History Net: [www.thehistorynet.com](http://www.thehistorynet.com)

Many more interesting history-focused web sites can be found using Internet search engines.

One of the best resources for military history research is **oral history**. Recorded interviews of veterans provide valuable and colorful historical perspectives. Their reminiscences include some of the most valuable background material about events, lifestyles, other soldiers and life on the home front. Oral history has become an integral part of many library, university and museum collections. To locate local or regional veterans for your own oral history

project, contact local chapters of national veterans groups, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

## MILITARY ARTIFACTS

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The THC does not identify or appraise artifacts because selling and trading artifacts encourages the destruction of archeological sites. However, agency archeologists realize that many people possess artifacts that are family keepsakes. Their greatest value is in the intrinsic worth to you, but you may want to know more about them. In such cases, we recommend that you consult a reputable dealer (who usually will identify and appraise artifacts for a fee) or call your local museum for information and recommendations.

Some people think that removing a few artifacts from a fort or battle site does no harm, because we already know the history of all of our military sites. Not true. Archeologists in Montana have nearly re-created the Battle of Little Big Horn on the ground and have learned much about the battle that was unknown to historians. Recently, Texas archeologists are successfully achieving the same results in several Red River War sites in the Texas Panhandle. These archeological investigations are possible only when the artifacts at the site remain intact.

Many archeological sites in Texas are protected by dense brush filled with rattlesnakes, mosquitoes, cactus, thorny scrub, occasional alligators and laws that prosecute trespassers on private land. Some sites — those on public land — are protected by state and federal antiquities laws that provide for fines and even imprisonment for violators. However, each individual Texan needs to preserve state archeological sites.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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For more information about the THC's Military Sites Program, call 512/463-5833. For more information about the THC's role in the preservation of archeological sites and artifacts, contact the Archeology Division at 512/463-6096 or send e-mail to [archeology@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:archeology@thc.state.tx.us). For more information about THC programs and activities, contact the Marketing Communications Division at 512/463-6255, or check the agency's web site at [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us). ■