
Researching Chinese American WW2 Ancestors

Managing Your Research & Leveraging Unique Resources

Chinese Family History Group – 18 Nov 2023

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An estimated 16,000 – 20,000 Chinese Americans served during World War Two. Researching their wartime and veteran stories presents some unique challenges. This presentation discusses strategies and methods to find, manage, and better leverage the ever-increasing availability of WW2 records and resources to further your research. (*Use this handout for note-taking and as a future reference.*)

OBJECTIVES

Attendees should come away with the following:

- an appreciation for the challenges associated with researching WW2 ancestors.
- strategies and methods for researching the wartime and post-war experiences of WW2 ancestors.
- an understanding of the wide variety of records and related resources available.

CHINESE AMERICAN SERVICE IN WW2

The number of Chinese Americans who served during WW2 has not yet been definitively determined and most estimates lack citations. According to a 1950 government report on WW2 Selective Service¹, a total of 15,998 Chinese registrants enlisted or were inducted:

- 14,377 in the Army. (This number includes the Army Air Forces.)
- 1,621 in the Navy. (This number likely includes Marines)

In 1996, COL (retired) William F Strobridge, who previously served as Chief Historian for the Center of Military History, estimated a range of 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese Americans served.² Approximately 10% served in Chinese American units (14th Air Service Group and 987th Special Communications Signal Co.)

CHALLENGES

Burned Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF) – 1973 Fire at NARA-St Louis

- Navy and Marine Corps files were not damaged!
- Army: those discharged 1 Nov 1912 - 31 Dec 1959 = estimated 80% loss.
- Air Force: those discharged 25 Sep 1947 - 31 Dec 1963 (surnames Hubbard – Z) = est. 75% loss.

Never assume a file doesn't exist. B-files (burned files) & R-files (reconstructed files) are still helpful.

Read: <https://www.wired.com/story/the-night-17-million-precious-military-records-went-up-in-smoke/>

¹ US Selective Service System, *Special Monograph No. 10, v1*. Government Printing Office 1953. p13.

² Marjorie Lee et al, *Duty & Honor*. Chinese Historical Society of Southern California 1998. p80.

Other Challenges

- Family papers tossed or scattered.
- Access to digitized records, websites, and social media resources come and go.
- Names of Chinese Americans were frequently mispronounced, misspelled and/or mis-ordered.
- Some collections are organized by military unit, *so you have to know your person's unit(s)*.
 - US Army Morning Reports (currently being digitized and will hopefully available next year.)
 - Unit-specific records at the National Archives (College Park), the Air Force Historical Research Agency (Maxwell AFB, Montgomery AL), and various museums/archives.

STRATEGIES & METHODS - Everything is a clue. *Everything*.

Harvest Known Info

- Consolidate any documents, photos, letters, medals, etc. that you have.
- Log both what you know and what is unconfirmed, such as family stories. (Annotate accordingly.)

Use a Simple Timeline

This is key to the effective search and analysis of military records.

Simplicity = Clarity. Gaps and connections will be easier to spot.

- Date + Age + Event + Source
- Only 1-2 lines per entry
- Include location (if known) with the event
- Color code relevant historic events and those involving family

Helpful hint: Keep links on the following page, by category:

Records, References, Newspaper Articles, Other, Photos.

Date	Age	Event	Source
23 Jan 1924	00	Born, Sioux Falls, SD	Multiple docs
9 Apr 1940	16	Invasion of Norway by Nazi Germany (USB claimed this was her inspiration to serve)	Historical event (Told to son)
15 May 1942	18	Establishment of Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (Age eligibility: 21-45 w/o dependents)	Historical event
10 Jul 1942	18	Father to AD as CPT in AAF (Personnel)	OMPF, Eric J Ellefson
2 Jul 1943	19	Establishment of Women's Army Corps (incl expansion of eligibility ages 20-50)	Historical event (CMH Pub 11-8, 220)
24 Jan 1944	20	Enlistment at WAC Recruiting Office, Los Angeles CA	Discharge
10 Feb 1944	20	Announcement: women enlistees can choose branch of service (Army Ground, Service, or Air Force)	LA Times dtd 11 Feb 1944, p2 c2
12 Feb 1944	20	Participation in mass enlistment ceremony of 500 women recruits at the Federal Bldg in LA	LA Times dtd 13 Feb 1944, p3 c1
14 Feb 1944	20	Report to AD (as Air WAC) at 1100 to WAC Rtgg Office, Pacific Electric Bldg, 610 S Main St, LA	Memorandum dtd 2 Feb 1944, WAC Rtgg
14 Feb 1944	20	Entrainment in late afternoon to Ft Des Moines, IA, First WAC Training Center. (One of 214 women)	Special Orders 30, dtd 5 Feb 1944, WAC Rtgg Office, LA
17 Feb 1944	20	Arrival Ft Des Moines, IA. Assignment to 12 th Co, 3 rd Regiment.	See above orders and Co Photo dtd 28 Mar 1944
< Aug 1944	20	Completion of Cryptographic Technician Trng. (Following failed attempts at 1 or 2 other MOSs)	Discharge and stated to daughter-K
< Aug 1944	20	Assignment to 524 AACSG Grp at Lynbrook (Long Island) NY (Actual assignment date not known)	As stated to daughter-K
5 Aug 1944	20	Arrival of future spouse to 524 AACSG Grp	DOB WD 66 (1951)

Prioritize Service Vitals

Service vitals are the military service equivalent to birth-marriage-death.

- Serial Number = important in verifying that you have the correct person.
- Service dates = enlistment/induction, assignments & overseas movements, and discharge.
- Unit(s) = your person likely served with more than one unit.

Abstract Records

Abstract each record or item. *Read collection descriptions*. Don't guess what abbreviations, acronyms, and terms mean (research them). Use Google. Use Wikipedia (verify the article is well sourced).

Here is an unofficial, but helpful, resource for WW2 military abbreviations (all services):

<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008988228>

Here is a reference for Navy & USMC abbreviations: <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/us-navy-abbreviations-of-ww2.html>

Analyze in Service Blocks

Don't overload trying to search or grasp someone's WW2 experience all at once. Think in service blocks:

Draft/Enlistment	Training	Wartime Unit(s)	VE and/or VJ Day to Discharge	Veteran Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer or Draftee? • Where/When? • Previous work? • College? ROTC? • Newspaper Announcements? • Local send-off? • Deferred? • Family in uniform? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military specialty? • Where trained? (Multiple places) • Training Dates? • Training life? • Newspapers? (Home & Local) • Naturalization? • Injured? • Fan Club? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What unit(s)? • Locations? • Job changes? • Promotions? • Awards? • Limited Duty? • KIA-WIA-injured? • Unit Histories? • Newspapers? • Fan Club? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where on VE/VJ? • What unit(s)? • Job changes? • Location change? • Point System? • Return to US? • Discharge location? • 'Home' location • Newspapers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filed discharge? • State Benefits? • GI Bill benefits? • Post-war work? • Post-war school? • Medical Issues? • Veteran groups? • Newspapers? (Entire life) • VA benefits/burial?

Consider Context

- Legislation. Policies. Major wartime events. Theater of Operations. Even mundane details.
- Personal and family events. Even if your person was away from home, these add nuance to their story.

Key events reference (basic)

01 Sep 1939	<i>WW2 begins with the invasion of Poland by Nazi forces (with major Luftwaffe support).</i>
Spring 1940	<i>Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, & France fall to Germany (May/June 1940).</i>
16 Sep 1940	Selective Training & Service Act. First peace-time draft. Obligation is 12 months active service.
16 Oct 1940	1st Registration (R-Day). Registration of men 21 - 35, inclusive. Over 16 million men register.
21 Aug 1941	Draftees extended to 18 months, resulting in Over the Hill in October (OHIO) protests.
07 Dec 1941	<i>Pearl Harbor is attacked. U.S. declares war on Japan (8 Dec).</i>
11 Dec 1941	<i>Germany and Italy declare war on the U.S. The U.S. reciprocates.</i>
20 Dec 1941	Men aged 18 - 64 required to register; those 20 - 44 liable for selection. Duration plus 6 months.
09 Mar 1942	The War Department is reorganized into the three components: Army Air Forces, Army Ground Forces, and Service of Supply (later renamed Army Service Forces).
27 Mar 1942	Second War Powers Act exempts aliens serving honorably from most naturalization requirements except proof of legal entry.
13 Nov 1942	Men 18 -19 become liable for service.
05 Dec 1942	Executive Order 9279 ends voluntary enlistment for ages 18 – 38.
22 Dec 1944	58 Stat. 886 exempts aliens serving honorably from providing proof of legal entry to naturalize.
08 May 1945	<i>V-E Day. Victory in Europe. (Announced and surrender signed.)</i>
15 Aug 1945	<i>V-J Day. Victory in Japan announced, with surrender on 2 Sep. Dates are 14 Aug & 1 Sep in U.S.</i>
28 Dec 1945	Passage of War Brides Act allows alien spouses/children to enter US as non-quota immigrants.
15 Oct 1946	Army suspends draft call-ups. (The Navy and USMC had stopped the previous May.)
31 Mar 1947	Expiration of the Selective Training and Service Act.

LOCATING OFFICIAL MILITARY RECORDS (Federal and State)

Ancestry.com

- Subscription. Check if local libraries subscribe to the Ancestry Library Edition.
 - Searching 'Military Records': only returns indexed records.
 - Using the Card Catalog returns all cataloged records (my preferred method):
Filter by *Military + United States* (or State) + *Time Period*. Sort by *Title* or *Records Count*.
To see what's new: Sort the Catalog by *Date Updated*, then filter by *Military + United States*
 - The U.S. Military Collection: (indexed only) <https://www.ancestry.com/cs/militaryrecords>
- Tip: Don't forget to search public trees. You may find military documents or photos posted.

FamilySearch.org

- Free. Some restrictions due to contracts.
- Searching by a person's name returns only indexed records.
- To see view all published (reviewed) military collections:
Click *Search* at top of homepage > select '*Records*' > Scroll to *Find a Collection* > click '*Browse all collections*' > Filter by *Military + United States* (or State) + *1900-1949*.
To see what's new: click '*Last Updated*' **twice** to sort by most recently added and updated collections.
- Each collection has a corresponding Research Wiki page. Click '*How to Use This Collection*.'
- Military Records Wiki page: [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United States Military Records](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Military_Records)

Fold3.com

- Subscription. Check if local libraries subscribe. Some offer remote patron access.
- Homepage has 'tiles.' Select *World War II* (United States), then use search box.
- To see what WW2 collections they have, click '*Publications*'. You can then explore each publication.
- To search more specifically, click *Search* at top of Fold3 homepage, then use filter options on left.
- To access see what's new: click *New & Updated Collections* tile on Fold3 homepage.
- Strongly recommended: "*Fold3 Training*" tile on homepage. Fold3 Blog at <https://blog.fold3.com> .

National Archives (NARA) - <https://www.archives.gov>

- Free. Limited digitization, of which most are not OCR searchable or have limited indexing.
- Of note is the "Access to Archival Databases" (AAD) section: <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/>
The AAD collections are archival electronic records created via punch cards. Many are available via the above websites, but the AAD provides better background and codes information.
- The catalog search function was recently updated and can be a steep learning curve.
From the homepage: '*Research Our Records*' > *Search the Catalog* > Enter your search terms.
(Also see: <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/catalog-guide> , though slightly outdated.)
- Direct links to selected WW2 records online at NARA are provided on page 7.

WW2 RECORDS - *Sampling for reference. Not discussed in detail.*

A = Ancestry.com, FS = FamilySearch.org, F3 = Fold3.com, N = Archives.gov (National Archives)

Recommended Initial Search

- Draft Cards of Young Men. Men age 18-44, inclusive. All states except Maine. (A, F3)
- Draft Cards of Old Men. Men age 45-64, inclusive. (Men born 27 Apr 1877 – 16 Feb 1897.)
All states except AL, FL, GA, ME, MS, NM, NC, SC, TN. (A, F3)
- BIRLS (Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem) Death File.
Lists information for deceased individuals who had received VA benefits *while alive*. (A, F3)
- Army Enlistment 'Records' Database (aka Army Serial Number File, 1938-1946).
Provides service entrance data of most, but not all, WWII Army personnel. (A, F3, FS)
NARA-AAD file: <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=3360&cat=WR26&bc=,sl>
- Military Headstone Applications. The form changed overtime. (A to 1985, FS to 1970)
- US Veteran Grave Sites. Compilation of information from military cemeteries. (A)
- Headstone and Internment Records for US Military Cemeteries on Foreign Soil, 1942-1949. (A)
- WWII Army Deserters Pay Cards. (A)
- Hospital Admissions Cards. Army only. Type of info provided varies. (A, F3)
- (If applicable) Cadet Nursing Corps Cards, 943-1948. Not military, a federal training program. (F3)

Other Records

- Military Discharges (aka Reports of Separation). Collections are by state - county. (FS)
- Various State Collections. Contents vary. Ancestry has IA & PA bonus/compensation records. (A, FS)
- Naturalization Petitions/Certifications (by state). Wartime service provided accelerated citizenship. (A)
- Officer Registers. all services. (A, F3)
- US Navy Muster Rolls. These by ship and by station/base. (A, F3)
- USMC Muster Rolls. These by ship and by station/base. (A, F3)
- US Navy Deck Logs (N) and US Navy War Diaries (F3)
- Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR). Army Air Forces. (F3, N)
- Escape & Evasion (E&E) Reports. Army & Army Air Forces. (N)
- USAF Award Cards. These include Army Air Forces personnel. (N)
- Prisoners of War Databases. (A, FS, N)
- POW/MIA - Unaccounted For. (A, F3)
- USMC Casualty Index (F3), Army/AAF Casualty List (F3), and WWII War Dead (A, F3, N)

Search Tips to Mitigate Name Errors

- In the Army Enlisted Record collection (via Ancestry or NARA), search by fields not name.
- If a collection allows you to search by serial number, use that if a name search isn't successful.

WW2 RESOURCES – A sampling of what is out there.

1. *Digitized Newspapers* – a key resource

- Free and subscription. Multiple websites: Chronicling America (free), Newspapers.com (\$), Genealogy Bank (\$), Accessible Archives (\$), university libraries (online collections),
- The WW2-era editions of the Stars & Stripes are available on Ancestry.
- Expand your search terms beyond your person's name. Consider searching for a unit, a type of unit, other people in the same unit, training bases & military facilities related to your person, post-war troop transport arrivals, other family members, even official news releases on legislation and policies.
- Hometown newspapers can provide community insights regarding local impacts and sentiments.

2. *State Libraries, Archives, Historical Societies, University, and Other Archive Collections*

- Free, wide variety of content. Explore the site; look for finding aides (call for help, if needed). Learn what is available online and in their non-digitized collections. May have a blog and/or podcast.
- Universities can have amazing donated collections, along with their own wartime and veteran-related records; may have yearbooks and alumni journals online.
- Find archives/collections by location or topic: ArchiveGrid - <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

3. *Unit Reunion and Remembrance Websites*

- Content varies from general info to digitized records and databases.
- Examples: 80th Division Veterans Association - <https://www.80thdivision.com/>
384th Bombardment Group - <http://www.384thbombgroup.com/>
USS Belknap (WWII) - <https://ussbelknap.wordpress.com/> (incl a crew list)

4. *Single Focus Websites* – Examples:

- Find-A-Grave: <https://www.findagrave.com>
- Veterans Legacy Memorial: <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov>
- China-Burma-India: <https://www.cbi-history.com> and http://www.cbi-theater.com/menu/cbi_home.html
- WW2 Army Medical Units: <https://www.med-dept.com> (phenomenal resource)
- Army Air Forces Collection: <https://aafcollection.info>
- US Naval Activities by State: <https://ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ref/USN-Act/>
- WWII Army Post Office (APO) Locations: <http://apo.swroberts.ca>
- Troop Transport Ships: <http://www.ww2troopships.com>
- American Legion Digital Archive (esp. weekly magazine): <https://archive.legion.org>
- POWs: <http://www.mansell.com/pow-index.html> (Japan), <http://www.merkki.com> (Germany)
- Naval History (British site, but lots of info): <http://naval-history.net>
- A great site for locating many online records is <https://www.militaryindexes.com> .

5. *Oral History Websites*

- Library of Congress Veterans History Project: <https://www.loc.gov/vets/vets-home.html>
- National WW2 Museum Oral Histories: <https://www.ww2online.org/browse>

6. *Special Websites for Additional Context* - Free, OCR searchable.

- Internet Archive (learn to use this site!): <https://archive.org/> Some *sample* items:
 - Encyclopedia of US Army Insignia & Uniforms: <https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaofun0000emer>
 - WWII Order of Battle (combat units): <https://archive.org/details/worldwariordero0000stan/>
 - The Army Clerk (Army manual – 1943): <https://archive.org/details/TM12-252-nsia/>
- Hathi Trust (items from academic & research libraries): <https://www.hathitrust.org>
- Google Books: <https://books.google.com/>

7. *Official Government Websites*

Free. Great for context. Recommended for intermediate/advanced research.

- U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH): <https://history.army.mil>
 - Click and explore the European-Mediterranean and Asia-Pacific tiles
 - WW2 Series (aka 'Green Books'): <https://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/collect/usaww2.html>
- Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC): <https://www.history.navy.mil>
- Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA): <https://www.afhra.af.mil>
Search index of their WWII holdings at <http://www.airforcehistoryindex.org>

8. *Videos & Podcasts* (for context)

- National WW2 Museum: <https://vimeo.com/nww2m>
- National Museum of the Pacific War: <https://www.youtube.com/@NationalMuseumofthePacificWar>

9. *Social Media*

- Facebook Groups (here are hundreds): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ArmyNurseCorpsinWWII>
- Blogs created by descendants, historians, re-enactors, etc. <https://thearrowheadclub.com>
- Podcasts: "Why We Fight ~ 1943". Sort the titles to find episodes of episode. (Phenominal podcast.)

10. *Wikipedia*: Military articles are typically written by experts & enthusiasts. Always check citations.

11. *WikiTree.com* (free) <https://wikitree.com>

Special projects include 'World War II.' Focus is on *documenting* individual and unit service details.

12. *History Hub*: <https://historyhub.history.gov>

This is an amazingly helpful crowd-sourced and staffed inquiry platform hosted by the National Archives.

NARA BONUS PAGE

NARA – 20th Century Military Records at the Regional Archives

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States,_National_Archives,_Military_Records,_1885-2004

NARA – Select WW2 Records Online

Army Air Forces

- *Air Force Award Cards* (incl AAF) at NARA: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/4530002>

FamilySearch Research Wiki page for Distinguished Flying Cross award cards:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States,_National_Archives,_RG_64,_Award_Cards,_1942-1963 (See other links on webpage)

- *Escape & Evasion Reports* (Europe) at NARA: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/305270>

- *Missing Air Crew Reports* (MACR) at NARA.

MACR Name Index at NARA: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/641086>

MACR at NARA: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/305256>

MACR at Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com/publication/95/missing-air-crew-reports-wwii/browse>

NAVY - *US Navy Deck Logs*: <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/logbooks/navy-online>

ALL - *War dead by service and state*: <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/army-casualties>

- Archival databases: <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp> (Select WW2)

Non-OMPF Records at the National Archives in St Louis:

<https://www.archives.gov/files/nonompfarchivalseries-arrresearchers-27september2018.pdf>

If your person was in the Army, I recommend emailing NARA-St Louis to request a copy of his or her Final Pay Voucher.

NARA WW2 Pictorial Finding Aides:

Explanatory: <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2021/06/29/subject-finding-aid-project/>

Update 1, incl A/C Army, Ambulances, Authors, and Personalities

<https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2021/08/04/subject-finding-aid-project-update/>

Update 2, wide range incl Chem Warfare WWI, D-Day, France Occ, Weapons, Women

<https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2021/10/19/subject-finding-aid-project-update-2/>

Update 3, incl WW2 PTO, CBI, and ETO, US equip (incl medical)

<https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2022/05/17/subject-finding-aid-project-update-3/>

NARA's Virtual Genealogy Fairs & Series: <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-series>

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