Where are Those Military Databases?

The Internet has done wonders for genealogy research, especially military research. Just what is a database and why is it important in my research. Almost all repositories of data like Ancestry, FamilySearch, Fold3, Newspapers rely on databases and those instructions that allow us to magically recall images, stories, and ancestral information at our fingertips.

A Brief Database Tutorial

Some of the oldest programming languages started as a set of instructions for computers to work on. FORTRAN, COBOL, and Assembly were some programming languages and they are still being used in one form or another today. Most modern data repositories use a language called Structured Query Language (SQL). SQL is useful on Relational Database Managed Systems (RDBMS) because the language allows quick access to data through specific command statements. Below are some of the basic commands.

Some of the Most Important SQL Commands

- **SELECT** - extracts data from a database
- **UPDATE** - updates data in a database
- **DELETE** - deletes data from a database
- **INSERT INTO** - inserts new data into a database
- **CREATE DATABASE** - creates a new database
- **ALTER DATABASE** - modifies a database
- **CREATE TABLE** - creates a new table
- **ALTER TABLE** - modifies a table
- **DROP TABLE** - deletes a table
- **CREATE INDEX** - creates an index (search key)
- **DROP INDEX** - deletes an index

CustomerID	CustomerName	ContactName	Address	City	PostalCode	Country
1	Alfreds Futterkiste	Maria Anders	Obere Str. 57	Berlin	12209	Germany
2	Ana Trujillo Emparedados y helados	Ana Trujillo	Avda. de la Constitución 2222	México D.F.	05021	Mexico
3	Antonio Moreno Taquería	Antonio Moreno	Mataderos 2312	México D.F.	05023	Mexico
4	Around the Horn	Thomas Hardy	120 Hanover Sq.	London	WA1 1DP	UK
5	Berglunds snabbköp	Christina Berglund	Berguvsvägen 8	Luleå	S-958 22	Sweden

An example of an SQL table in a simple database. Vertical columns are table names, horizontal lines are data inserted into the table.

In its simplest format, data can be written out with a simple SQL statement like "SELECT * FROM "ADDRESSDATABASE" where the asterisk means give me everything. If the table above was named ADDRESSDATABASE, the statement would select everything in the table and print it out to the computer screen. What you don't see when you are searching sites like Ancestry, Fold3, or FamilySearch is the behind the scene statements built when you type in your search criteria. The sites have taken all the hard work in programming and made it simple for you to do your searches. The limitation is the web site may not let you have access to everything. However, they do give you a lot of options for searching for your information.

If you compare Ancestry, FamilySearch, Fold3, Newspapers, they all seem to have different ways to ask what you are looking when it comes to searches. Some websites may not have a lot of databases, while National Archive, Ancestry, and FamilySearch have numerous databases. All databases are not created equal either; however, a lot of effort goes into their search criteria to help you out.

What databases are there for researching Military Ancestors? One of the most popular is Fold3 (https://www.fold3.com) and it is available through the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Library system. But there are others. Some are free and others require membership.

Cyndi's List (https://cyndislist.com) (Free) Search for "Military Genealogy" Over 1600 hits.

National Archive (https://aad.archives.gov/aad) (Free) Over 400 databases available.

Your local neighborhood Google website (https://google.com) (Free) the World is your oyster. Skip the Ads, lots of useful websites dedicated to Military Genealogy. How you frame your search criteria can yield results.

Daughters of the American Revolution – DAR (https://www.dar.org/)

Son of the American Revolution – SAR (https://www.sar.org)

        The DAR has a free Ancestor search (look under Library) where SAR you have to be a member to access their databases. If your ancestor's information was submitted to either of these organizations, it can yield a wealth of information.

The Military Branches (Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard) are offering searches for those who served in the U.S. military. The Academies are especially useful for looking up former graduates. The U.S. Air Force has a web site for Basic Military Training (BMT) photos from past years (https://www.bmtflightphotos.af.mil/). It is a list of photos submitted by past Air Force personnel of graduations from Lackland AFB. Not searchable, but it is listed by year, month and flights (a basic training personnel unit of 30 to 40 men or women). If you knew when your ancestor served, his flight picture might be listed. Again, this is a volunteer project and not all flights are listed. The pictures showed usually include names in the photograph. My unit Squadron 3704 Flt 1377 is listed (January 1971), want to see a young me? Think you can pick me out?

Wikipedia – The free encyclopedia (https://www.wikipedia.org/) a lot of military stories, articles and resources can be found through Wikipedia. The caveat I am told, it is not considered a reliable source only because almost anyone with a Wikipedia account can change the information. I do find the resources listed at the bottom of the articles leads to other information just as or more reliable. They are getting better at vetting their sources, so don't discount this website. This is a database; treat it like one formulating your search criteria.

Ancestor databases like Ancestry.com, MyHeritage, FamilySearch, and LostCousins (UK). Ancestry and MyHeritage are subscription based, but you can access them with your Library Card. The Ancestry Library edition is only accessible from any local library branch in Bernalillo County. MyHeritage Library Edition you can use from the comfort of your home with your library card. FamilySearch and LostCousins are free websites. They do require free account sign-ups but are very useful. FamilySearch is the most extensive since it is an LDS maintained resource offering full access. In FamilySearch, not all data is fully indexed, but may be available as an image. It does require a lot of patience if you are willing to browse through the images for your ancestor's data. Look at FamilySearch and search using the "Subject", type in Military and see what results in you get. Extensive database collections from around the world are listed in alphabetical order. Be creative in your search criteria. If you only want U.S. information, type in "United States Military". It will narrow the list down from several thousand to a few hundred. How you frame your search criteria will help narrow the field.

Do not discount local military websites by individuals or organizations. These volunteer sites depend upon people like you and me to supply family information if they served in a specific military unit. Some of these sites may be static, meaning they have not been updated for a long time. They can still be very useful.   For Example, I was researching a Marine aviation squadron VMB-613 for a colleague. I found from a Google search, images of VMB-613, a USMC veteran locator website, and a website dedicated to VMB-613 (http://www.vmb613.com/). If you ever wondered how the U.S. Navy ever designated their squadrons, there's a Wikipedia page for that too (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Navy_and_U.S._Marine_Corps_Aircraft_Squadron_Designations). The VMB613 website has a database of personnel who served with that unit and low and behold, her father was listed with rank and occupation specialty. While this is not a formal genealogical document, it will help to collaborate with other information you may be searching. Also, not all websites have a search feature. You may have to browse through their information to find what you are looking for. However, a handy keyboard feature usually found in all web browsers is "Ctrl – F", a local search of information the web page you are looking at. You can type in a name or place and see if the information is available on the web page. If you do not get any hits, then you know to move on.

One of the largest databases is Archive.org (https://www.archive.org) this website is dedicated to archiving everything on the Internet. It contains old websites, old software, old games, books, films, pictures, and music. You name it and it more than likely will end up here. More data is being uploaded all the time and it's a free account. Not only can you search for free, but you can also submit information for archiving for free too. I found a military unit history on the internet of my brother's father-in-law service in WW2. The book did not have copyright assigned so I submitted the unit history to Archive.org for everyone to find. The book did not specifically detail any information about my brother's father-in-

law, but what it did have was a unit picture with him sitting with his fellow servicemen. What a find! I read where his unit trained, served and the battles they fought. I also submitted it to Fold3 for inclusion. They researched the book and found it met their criteria for inclusion in their database. The book is searchable in Archive.org, and free downloads are available in a variety of formats provided by Archive.org. A lot of local county histories are saved here and may yield ancestors not otherwise found through the other databases. It is a great resource.

I almost forgot to mention Internet Book Repositories and Newspapers. These book databases are either indexed or digitized for download. WorldCat, Project Gutenberg, Library of Congress and Google are a few with millions of books available at your fingertips. Authors have written extensively about military wars and battles. A search sometimes yields ancestors mentioned in historical stories and articles. Newspaper articles through subscription services (Newspapers.com or NewspaperArchive.com) and the Free Library of Congress Chronicling America can offer stories about family members. Typically, the image of the newspaper page is shown and available for download. One last newspaper not to overlook is the "Stars and Stripes" military newspaper. Ancestry has several databases of issues covering WW1 and WW2.

Bottom line; think outside the box when you are formulating a database search. Look for help and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about how to use the database. Someone may have asked the same question and someone responded with an answer to aid in your search. Explore the databases. If you cannot find an answer to your question, then use Google to find it. You would be surprised what might turn up? Google and other big search engines have help features to maximize your searches. If you enter too much information in your search and nothing turns up, back out some of the information. Sometimes less yields more results. How many times in Ancestry or other genealogy programs have you zeroed in on a specific date and not gotten any responses? If the date has a range, open it up to cover a wider set of dates. It may be you have gotten some bad information or the information offered is different from what you might expect. Family is notorious for not getting everything correct. It's like the old experiment with a line of people, the first person whispers a phrase to the next person to pass on to the next one in line and does it ever make to the end in its original form? Usually not. Databases are only as good as the person entering the information. Unless it has an original picture of a document, you have to take it with a grain of salt to collaborate it with other information you have gathered.

In Summary, what does this all mean? A wealth of information is available to us at our fingertips if we know what to look for in our searches. Not all databases are created equal and do require investigation to gather the most information we can from them. The Internet is a great tool, but sometimes, you have to go to the best database of all, a field trip to where it happened and put your fingers on the actual document. Someone posted a picture on Facebook of one of the earliest search engines. Know what it was? It was a Library Card Index. Rows and rows of drawers with the little library index cards. It is hard to argue with that.

Good luck and good searching.

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