

## SUVCW National Graves Registration Database

The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) National Graves Registration Project was established in 1996. Since then, hundreds of dedicated people from within and without our Order have graciously devoted thousands of hours of their time and energy visiting cemeteries, recording, verifying, researching and entering the final resting places of Civil War veterans. From the beginning, one thing was missing - the means for the SUVCW and the general public to search and view the results of our labor on the Internet. As the number of registrations grew, it was also apparent that duplication of effort and waste of time was reaching an unacceptable level, without knowledge of what was completed and what needed further investigation.

The National Graves Registration Database (<http://www.suvcwdb.org/home>) is now available to all. The database was activated February 22, 2005. This will make all original registrations available for viewing by the general public, as well as allowing for new registrations to be entered through our online program.

It is our hope that this online database program will promote increased interest in the SUVCW National Graves Registration Project and take us to an entirely new level of achievement. Depending on the source referenced, there were between 4.2 and 4.8 million Union Civil War Veterans. Due to mass burials, unreported battlefield losses, burials at sea and other circumstances, we can never expect to register all Union graves, but with your assistance we will succeed in honoring the "boys in blue" to the best of our ability.

For more information contact: [Camp2GRO@suvpac.org](mailto:Camp2GRO@suvpac.org)

In 1866, Union Veterans of the Civil War organized into the *Grand Army of the Republic* (GAR) and became a social and political force that would control the destiny of the nation for more than six decades. Membership in the veterans' organization was restricted to individuals who had served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Revenue Cutter Service during the Civil War, thereby limiting the life span of the GAR. The GAR existed until 1956.

In 1881 the *Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War* (SUVCW) was formed to carry on its traditions and memory long after the GAR ceased to exist. Membership is open to any man who can prove ancestry to a member of the GAR or to a veteran eligible for membership in the GAR.

## Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

### *Southern California Camps*

#### **Gen. W. S. Rosecrans Camp No. 2**

##### **Los Angeles**

[www.suvpac.org/camp2.html](http://www.suvpac.org/camp2.html)

#### **Gens. Sedgwick-Granger Camp No. 17**

##### **Santa Ana**

[www.suvpac.org/camp17.html](http://www.suvpac.org/camp17.html)

#### **Gen. George Stoneman Jr. Camp No. 18**

##### **Riverside**

[www.suvpac.org/camp18.html](http://www.suvpac.org/camp18.html)

#### **Sgt. William Pittenger Camp No. 21**

##### **Escondido**

[www.suvpac.org/camp21.html](http://www.suvpac.org/camp21.html)

#### **William T. Sherman Camp No. 28**

##### **Santa Barbara**

[www.suvpac.org/camp28.html](http://www.suvpac.org/camp28.html)



## Researching Your Civil War Ancestors

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## Family Stories

Researching one's Civil War ancestors is both interesting and historical. Interesting because they are our ancestors; historical because we learn so much more from history when we study the context in which they were involved in such a conflict as the Civil War.

Where do we start? The first place is to get a good history on the Civil War and read about it. Knowing the history helps us to know where to look when we begin researching our ancestors. After a few basics of the scope of the conflict is understood, it will get us excited about our ancestors to understand that they were part of such a pivotal moment in the history of our country.

The second place to start is with our ancestors. No, not the one you think was in the Civil War. Rather, to start with yourself and work backwards. Don't make the mistake of making conclusions based on assumptions or you may end up in the wrong place with the wrong person. Most of us start with a family story told by a parent or grandparent: "Did you know that great-grandpa was in the Civil War?" True or not, family stories are the place to start. I was always told that my great-grandfather, William G. Dickey, was a Major in the Union Army and that he led his troops at the Battle of Gettysburg where he was wounded in the charge of his men. Well, yes and no. After I looked his Civil War record up, I discovered he was a Sgt. Major, was never at Gettysburg, and was wounded the last day of the war retreating from the enemy position when a cannon ball burst near him giving him life-long injuries from which he would die about 23 years after the war had ceased.

So, family stories are the beginning but not the ending for finding out the truth of your ancestor in the Civil War. Fading memories, a desire to "polish up" the story a little bit, and just plain confusion of facts can send one on a wild goose chase, but the family stories are a vital part of beginning the search. Most

families have heard, "Grandpa was in the 121<sup>st</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers and served for three years." Knowing that tells you two important things — a unit number and a place. That is the start for looking for records. Grandpa may have actually been in the 118<sup>th</sup> Volunteers but now you know to not look in New York records to start.

## Basic Records

My last article talked about reading a good history on the Civil War to give your ancestor perspective. Then, talk with your living relatives, parents, grandparents and cousins, to see if they have letters, remembrances, or articles from your Civil War ancestor.

Now, you are ready to go to the historical records themselves. There is much more available online to help you search for the proper archives records collections than ever before. Start at <http://www.archives.gov> where you can search their indexes. NARA (National Archives & Records Administration) has three important records groups available for search and document photoduplicating for Civil War ancestors. All are important records for information. These records are the Compiled Military Service Records (CMSR), Pension Application Files, and Records of Events. The first details your ancestor's service record; when he enlisted, when he was discharged, what he was paid, oftentimes his physical description, where he served, and other important data. If he was wounded, you may find a treasure trove of medical records. The second group includes records relating to a pension, if given, the amount of the pension, proof of marriage for a spouse, and any number of other items submitted to prove a claim. The last is Records of Events. Sometimes, additional information about a soldier's war activities can be deduced from the compilations of the activities of each company known as the "Record of Events." These records, which were compiled from information on the original muster rolls and returns, are uneven in content. Although they

rarely name individual soldiers, the descriptions of the activities and movements of the company can be used, in conjunction with the soldier's CMSR and pension file, to determine where the soldier was and what he was doing. These three records groups can provide clues for important relationships for your ancestor and his family.

Unfortunately, the process of getting these records is a bit more complicated today and much more expensive than even a few years ago, as the government has cut back on public services. But if you can find your ancestor in one of these records groups, you may hit a really important collection of information. They are worth the time and money to explore if you are serious about learning more on your Civil War ancestor.

*(Dr. Dickey is a Certified Genealogist through the Board of Certification for Genealogists in Washington, D.C. in the area of English Research and a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists. He is Senior Pastor of the United Methodist Church of Westlake Village, California and serves as Chaplain of the Gen. W. S. Rosecrans Camp No. 2, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Besides genealogy and research, he enjoys travelling and playing the bagpipes.)*

## Some Websites for Civil War Research

Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System  
[www.itd.nps.gov/cwss](http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss)

Illinois State Archives  
[www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases.html](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases.html)

New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center  
[www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/civil\\_index.htm](http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/civil_index.htm)

[www.cyndislist.com/us/civil-war/](http://www.cyndislist.com/us/civil-war/)

[www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)