

# Compiled Military Service Records

## Part I: The records inside the CMSR jacket

*In honor of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this is the third in a series of articles about records at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., that are useful in researching the war and its participants.*

**I**n the last issue of *NGS Magazine*, we learned that General Fred Crayton Ainsworth's leadership caused the creation of 58 million cards that comprise the Compiled Military Service Records (CMSR) of volunteer soldiers of the Revolutionary War, Post-Revolutionary era, War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War (Union and Confederate), Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, and various Indian wars, as well as the carded medical records of the Mexican War and Civil War (Union). These records, which are part of Record Group (RG) 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (AGO), 1780s–1917, make it absurdly easy to access information that would otherwise be incredibly challenging and time consuming to access in its original form.

Civil War CMSR (Union and Confederate) are arranged by state, then by regiment, then alphabetically by soldier's name. In this article, we discuss the different types of records typically found inside an individual soldier's CMSR jacket.

### **CMSR jacket cover**

The CMSR jacket (envelope) holds one or more information cards and (sometimes) a personal

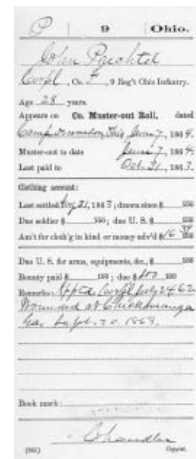
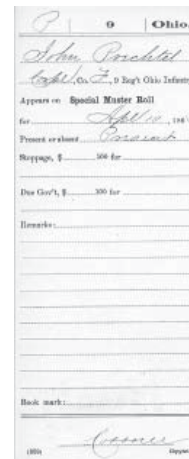
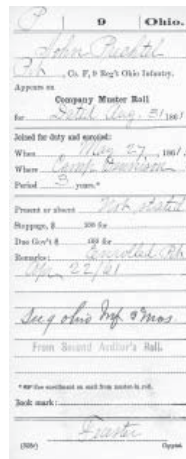
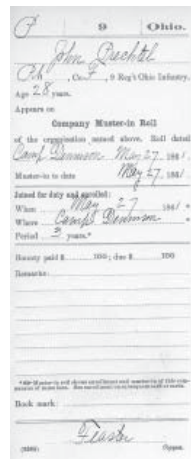
papers jacket with additional original Civil War records. Confederate CMSRs usually have less information because of wartime records loss.

The outside of the CMSR jacket has eight data elements: (1) soldier's name, (2) military unit, (3) rank upon entering the service, (4) rank upon discharge from service, (5) a list of "card numbers," (6) the number of "personal papers" inside the jacket, (7) "book mark" information if relevant, and (8) "see also" cross references if relevant. The number inscribed above the soldier's name refers to the jacket's numerical place in that regiment's CMSRs, which was (and still is) used as an aid in refiling them properly.

The soldier's name is the one he enlisted under or most often used in the original records.

The military unit is the regiment designation plus the company or companies in which the man served. (Artillery regiments had batteries instead of companies). All records of a man's service in one regiment are filed in his CMSR for that regiment. If he later served in another regiment, he has a separate CMSR for the other regiment.

The "card numbers" refer to the mechanically stamped number on the reverse side of each card found inside the jacket. (The card's date of creation was mechanically stamped at the same time.) Ainsworth's staff kept meticulous track of the original source of the information on each card, so that if it was necessary to consult that original record, there was a way identify it. The



card numbers were also a means of counting the number of cards created. There are eighteen card numbers listed on the outside of the jacket of George H. Moulton, 38th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, so there are eighteen CMSR cards inside.

If the “number of personal papers herein” is one or more, that means there is a smaller “personal papers jacket” inside with that number of original Civil War paper records enclosed.

The notation next to “book mark” refers to an entirely separate file in RG 94 that may describe arcane nuances of the organizational history of the man’s military unit, the conclusions of the AGO’s investigation into a particular aspect of the man’s service, or some other matter. The files to which “book mark” refers will be discussed in a future article in this series. In addition, the CMSR usually has a *Notation* card that summarizes the conclusions of the “book mark” file.

The inside of the CMSR jacket cover may have notations made by the AGO if it received inquiries about the soldier from the pension office or other sources after the creation of his CMSR.

### CMSR cards

The CMSR cards inside the jacket are abstracts made from original records such as muster rolls, returns, pay vouchers, orders, and other records with information about an individual soldier. The abstracts were done with such care

and completeness that reference to the original records is not necessary. Information may include mustering-in, mustering-out, wounds, hospitalization, absence from the unit, capture and imprisonment by the enemy, court-martial, and death. These cards provide an outline of a man’s service from enrollment to discharge. The most common cards are described below.<sup>1</sup>

Company Muster-in Roll card includes the soldier’s name, unit, rank, age, date, and place the roll was made, muster-in date, date and place the man “joined for duty and enrolled,” which is usually earlier than the muster-in date, length of enlistment, and remarks, such as whether bounty was paid. The Battery Muster-in Roll and Individual Muster-in Roll cards have similar information.

Company Descriptive Book card includes the soldier’s name, unit, rank, age at enlistment, physical description (height and color of hair, eyes, and complexion), date and place of enlistment (or mustering in), by whom enlisted and length of enlistment, and remarks. The Regimental Descriptive Book and Battery Descriptive Book cards have the same information.

Company Muster Roll card or Battery Muster Roll card includes the soldier’s name, rank, unit, the period of time covered by the muster roll (usually two months), whether present or absent, dollar amounts for money owed the

government for some reason, and remarks, such as "Received \$13 in advance" or "Absent sick in hospital since the 22nd Sept. 1864." The Special Muster Roll card has similar information except that the muster was taken on a date other than the usual bi-monthly muster. The Muster Roll card was used for temporary units. Seth N. Combs, 2nd Ohio Cavalry, appeared on a "Muster Roll of General M. D. Munson's Escort and enlisted men detailed at Headquarters 2 Div., 23 A. C." at Strawberry Plains, Tennessee, November and December 1863. The card also indicates when the man's clothing account was last settled and the amount drawn since then (if applicable), whether present or absent, and remarks. The Hospital Muster Roll card was used for men detailed to work in regimental hospitals, such as the card for O. E. Waste, 92nd New York Infantry, who was attached to the regimental hospital as a nurse on 15 January 1862.

Company Muster-out Roll card includes the soldier's name, unit, rank, age, date and place the roll was made, muster-out date, and "last paid to" date. The original muster-out roll marked the end of the soldier's service in that unit, so it was an important financial accounting record. The date the soldier's clothing account was "last settled" is noted, along with the dollar amount drawn since that date (if any), the dollar amount due the soldier (if any), the dollar amount due the U.S. government (if any), and finally the "amount for clothing in kind or money advanced" (if any). Next, if the soldier owed the government anything for his "arms, equipment, etc." that dollar amount is noted. The amount of bounty he had received and the amount of bounty he was still owed is given. The value of horse and horse equipment, if applicable, is given on cards for men in cavalry companies. Finally there is space for remarks. The Detachment Muster-out Roll and Individual Muster-out Roll cards have the same information. The Battery Muster-out Roll card also notes the value of horse and horse equipment, if applicable.

This card can pack a lot of information in one place as demonstrated by the muster-out card for George H. Moulton, 38th Massachusetts Infantry.

He was mustered out at Savannah, Georgia, 30 June 1865, but was last paid through 30 June 1864. His clothing account was last settled 31 August 1863, and the government owed him \$5.34 for clothing. On the other hand, he owed the U.S. government \$6 for arms, equipment, etc. He had received \$25 in bounty money but was still owed \$75. He was also entitled to \$10 in extra pay for May and June 1864 as a result of his promotion to corporal on 29 March 1863.

Muster and Descriptive Roll of a Detachment of U.S. Volunteers forwarded card includes the soldier's name, rank, date and place the muster roll was made, birth place, age at enlistment, occupation, date and place of enlistment, length of enlistment, date and place of mustering in, physical description (height and color of hair, eyes, and complexion), bounty paid, amount of bounty due, town to which the enlistment was credited, dollar value of horse and horse equipment, and remarks. This record usually relates to men recruited later in the war. Three cards with similar information are titled Descriptive Roll of a Detachment of Recruits forwarded, Muster and Descriptive Roll of a Detachment of Drafted Men and Substitutes forwarded, and Muster and Descriptive Roll.

Muster and Descriptive Roll of Veteran Volunteers card includes the soldier's name, rank, unit, date and place the roll was made, date and place of enlistment, birth place, age at enlistment, occupation, length of enlistment, physical description (height and color of hair, eyes, and complexion), bounty paid, amount of bounty due, town to which the enlistment was credited, company to which assigned, and remarks. Veteran volunteers were men who reenlisted in the same unit at the expiration of their original enlistments. Another version of this card is titled M. and D. Roll of Veteran Volunteers.

Descriptive List of Deserters card includes the soldier's name, rank, unit, age, physical description (height and color of hair, eyes, and complexion), birth place, occupation, date and place enlisted, date and place mustered in, length of enlistment, date and place deserted, date and



place apprehended, date and place the list was made, and remarks.

Descriptive List of Deserters Arrested card includes the soldier's name, rank, unit, date of the roll and which provost marshal signed it, date and place deserted, date and place arrested, remarks, and the location the man was taken following arrest. The remarks may indicate the circumstances of the desertion and arrest, such as these concerning Lucius Cleveland, 13th Michigan Infantry, who was arrested 20 March 1865: "Says he had a furlough to leave at Chattanooga to go to his home in Van Buren Co. Mich. dated June 16 [18]64 & failed to report at expiration of furlough. \$30 allowed for apprehension and delivery to Pro[vo] Mar[shal's] office."

List card varies in content depending upon the information provided in the original list. Seth N. Combs, 2nd Ohio Cavalry, was on a "List of Prisoners confined in Military Prison at Wheeling, Va. (also known as Atheneum Prison)" on 9 September 1864 that includes his age, physical description (height and color of eyes, hair, and complexion), occupation, place of residence, date and place arrested and by whom, charges, and remarks.

Returns card typically indicates the soldier appeared on one or more "returns" (lists) with certain information. For example, the returns card for Lucius Cleveland, 13th Michigan Infantry, indicates "May to July 1862 Absent sick, Nashville Tenn. Mar. 29/62," and several other similar entries. The regimental return card indicates the date and place the return was made, the period it covers, gain or loss (if applicable), and remarks.

Notation card summarizes the AGO's conclusions about a particular aspect of the soldier's service and gives the "book mark" file number. For example, the notation card for Martin Chrispell, 3rd Michigan Cavalry, references file 9688-A-1884 and indicates that the AGO on 29 August 1885 determined that "The charge of desertion of July 17, 1865, against this man is removed and he is discharged to date July 17, 1865, under the provisions of the act of Congress, approved July 5, 1884." The notation card for Orlando Hutchinson, 8th Michigan

CASUALTY SHEET.

Name, John Prechtel  
Rank, Corpl, Company 7, Regiment, 9  
Arm, Inftry, State, Ohio  
Place of casualty, Not stated

Nature of casualty, Wounded

Date of casualty, Sept 19 + 20 - 1863.

FROM WHAT SOURCE THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED.

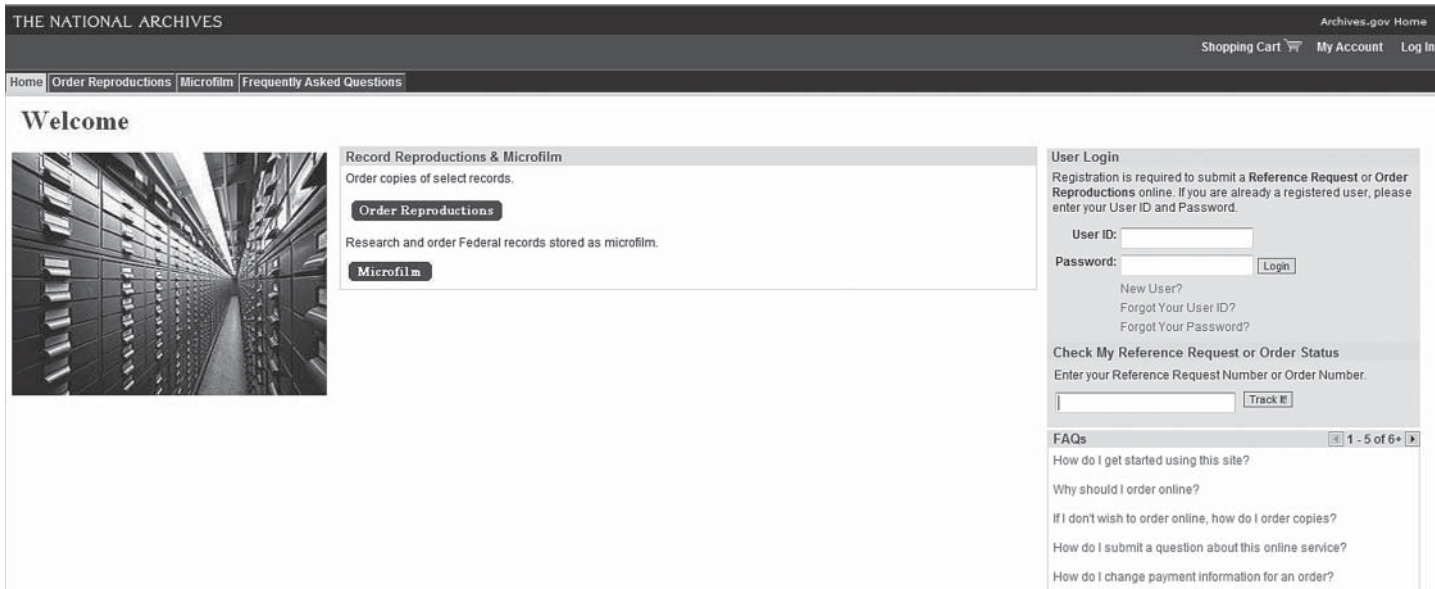
Report of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of the \_\_\_\_\_ Regiment,  
Brigade, 3 Division, 14 Corps, dated Chattanooga  
Oct 11-13. Signed by Mr. Brauman Brig. Genl.  
Comdy Div. Prechtel 17<sup>th</sup> Regt. Part II.

A. Hallowell  
5-8-79, Clerk.

Cavalry, references file Hpn-180-1866 and indicates the AGO on 2 April 1866 determined that Hutchinson "Died January 31, 1864, at Andersonville Ga. while a prisoner of war."

### CMSR personal papers

Not all soldiers have a personal papers jacket inside the CMSR, and those that do have relatively few papers. The outside of the personal papers jacket indicates the number and types of papers the AGO placed inside. It is likely the AGO called these items personal papers because each provides information about just one person. The three most common items are the soldier's enlistment paper for his first (or second) enlistment, certificates of discharge for disability or death, or casualty sheet indicating date and place of death or wounding. The types of papers can vary broadly, however, such as hospital bed cards, burial records, court martial charges, descriptive lists, final statements, furloughs or leaves of absence, medical certificates, medical



descriptive lists, orders, prisoner of war records, and resignations. Also possible are other papers relating to admission to or discharge from a hospital, confinement, contracts, a list of the decedent's personal effects, desertion, duty, pay or clothing, transportation, rank, medical examination, or transfer to Veterans Reserve Corps.

### Where to find CMSRs

Several alphabetical name indexes to Union and Confederate CMSRs have been microfilmed. All Confederate CMSRs have been microfilmed. Union CMSRs for Alabama, Arkansas, Dakota Territory, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York (1st Engineers only), North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia, have been microfilmed as well as those for the U.S. Volunteer Infantry (former Confederate prisoners of war) and many U.S. Colored Troops. For more information, go to "Order Online" (<http://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>) (click on the "Microfilm" tab for free access to descriptive pamphlets and rolls lists). Microfilmed CMSRs are available at selected National Archives facilities, libraries, and other genealogical research facilities. CMSRs or CMSR indexes are available online at Fold3 or Ancestry.com.

Copies of CMSRs can also be obtained from the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, using "Order Online" (<http://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>) (click on the "order reproductions" tab to get started) or by postal mail using NATF Form 86, National Archives Order for Copies of Military Service Records, available online (<http://www.archives.gov/forms/pdf/natf-86.pdf>).

For more information about military records in the National Archives, consult Trevor K. Plante, *Military Service Records at the National Archives*, Reference Information Paper 109 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, rev. 2009), available online (<http://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/rip109.pdf>).

### Notes

1. Nearly all CMSR cards have a "book mark" line that is usually blank so this is not mentioned in the descriptions.

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*Claire Prechtel-Klusens, a microfilm projects archivist at NARA, served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at [cklusens@verizon.net](mailto:cklusens@verizon.net).*