Finding your World War I Ancestor

Presentation by
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Director of Reference and Instructional Library Services
NSU Alvin Sherman Library
Genealogical Society of Broward County
April 2, 2017
A Brief History of World War I

• 1914
  • June 28: Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Duchess Sophie
  • July 28: Declarations of War – Austria-Hungary v. Serbia; Russia mobilizes against Austro-Hungary; Germany v Russia. By August 3, France v. Germany; August 4: Great Britain v. Germany
  • August 4: President Wilson declares American neutrality
  • September: Battle of the Marne

• 1915:
  • Feb.15: Germany begins unrestricted submarine warfare around Great Britain
  • May 7: Sinking of the Lusitania
  • Sept.-Oct: Battle of Loos

• 1916:
  • Feb.-Dec.: Battle of Verdun – 600,000-700,000 casualties
  • July-Nov.: Battle of the Somme – more than 1 million casualties
United States Entry into WWI

- **1917:**
  - March 1: Zimmermann Telegram
  - April 2: Wilson addresses Congress
  - April 6: Congress declares war on Germany
  - May 18: Congress passes the Selective Service Act
  - June 19: first troops from the American Expeditionary Force [AEF], led by General John J. Pershing, land in France

- **1918**
  - May: Battle of Cantigny. First significant American battle
  - June: Battle of Belleau Wood. 10,000 Americans killed, wounded or missing
  - Sept.: Battle of Saint-Mihiel
  - Sept.-Nov.: Meuse-Argonne offensive
  - November 11: Armistice Day
Did your ancestor serve in WW I?

- One way to find out is to check the United States 1930 census!
- How did they answer this section
  - Veterans. Whether a veteran of U.S. military or naval forces
    - Yes or No? If Yes then -
    - What War or expedition?
    - look for WW or GW
Did your ancestor serve in WW I?

• One way to find out is to check the United States 1930 census!
• How did they answer this section Veterans. Whether a veteran of U.S. military or naval forces Yes or No? If Yes then What War or expedition? look for WW or GW.
The Selective Service Act of 1917

This Act required all males in the United States, citizen or not, between the ages of 21 and 45, to register for military service. By the end of the war in 1918 over 24 million men had registered for the draft. Almost 25% of the total U.S. population!

There were three draft registration drives –
• June 5, 1917
• June 5, 1918
• Sept. 12, 1918

Each drive used a slightly different registration card.
### World War I Draft Registration Card A—(5 June 1917)

**Registration Card**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form 1</th>
<th>REGISTRATION CARD</th>
<th>No. ________</th>
<th>Age in years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Name in full</td>
<td>(Given name)</td>
<td>(Family name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Home Address</td>
<td>(No.)</td>
<td>(street)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Date of birth</td>
<td>(month)</td>
<td>(day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Where were you born?</td>
<td>(town)</td>
<td>(state)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If not a citizen, of what nation are you a citizen or subject?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is your present trade, occupation, or office?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>By whom employed?</td>
<td>Where employed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Married or single (which)? Race (specify which)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>What military service have you had? Rank ________ branch ________ years ________ Nation or State ________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

__________________________
(Signature or Mark)

---

**Registrar's Report**

1. Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? slender, medium, or stout (which)?
2. Color of eyes ________ Color of hair ________ Bald ________
3. Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, eye, or both eyes or is he otherwise disabled (specify)?

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows

__________________________
(Signature of Registrar)

Precinct ________
City or County ________
State ________
(Date of Registration)
World War I Draft Registration Card B—(5 July 1918)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Name in full (Given name) (Family name)</th>
<th>Registration No.</th>
<th>Age in Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Home Address (P) (street or R.E.D) (city or town) (state)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Date of birth (month) (day) (year)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Where were you born? (city or town) (state) (nation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I am □ 1. Native of the United States □ 2. Naturalized Citizen □ 3. Alien □ 4. Declared Intention □ 5. Noncitizen or citizen Indian (strike out items or words not applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If not a citizen, of what nation are you a citizen or subject?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Father's birthplace (city or town) (state or province) (nation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Name of employer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Place of employment (P) (street or R.E.D) (city or town) (state)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Name of nearest relative (P) (street or R.E.D) (city or town) (state)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race—White, Negro, Indian (strike out items or words not applicable)

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

PH.G.O (Signature or Mark of Registrant)  (Signature of Registrar)  (Date of Registration)  (Stamp of Local Board)

Ancestry.com

Form 1 (blank)
# World War I Draft Registration Card C—(12 September 1918)

## REGISTRATION CARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERIAL NUMBER</th>
<th>ORDER NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First name** | **Middle name** | **Family name**

2 **PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS**

**No.** (Street or R.D. number) (City or town) (County) (State)

**Age by Years** | **Date of Birth**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Month** | **Day** | **Year**
|---------|---------|---------|

**RACE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>Oriental</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Non-Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**U.S. CITIZEN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Born</th>
<th>Naturalized</th>
<th>Exempt by Parker's Naturalization before Register's Majority</th>
<th>Declared</th>
<th>Non-declared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 If not a citizen of the U.S., of what nation are you a citizen or subject?

**PRESENT OCCUPATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER'S NAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(No.) (Street or R.D. number) (City or town) (County) (State)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEAREST RELATIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.**

**PM.G.O.**

Form No. 1

(Registrant's signature or mark)

**REGISTRAR’S REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEIGHT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BUILD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLOR OF EYES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLOR OF HAIR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, eye, or is he obviously physically disqualified? (Specify)

30 I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature or mark and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:


Signature of Registrar

Date of Registration

Twenty Question Card

For more helpful family history charts and forms visit www.ancestry.com/ancestry/charts/chart.html

MyFamily.com, Inc. © 2002

Ancestry.com
Locating Draft Card Records

United States records digitized from:

- World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 (National Archives)
  - Family Search
  - Ancestry
- Ancestry and FindMyPast have British records. Ancestry has some German records.
John Lyons, 1917, France
On July 12, 1973 the St. Louis facility of the National Personnel Records Center suffered a terrible fire.

16-18 million Official Military Personnel Files were destroyed. This included 80% of the records for Army Personnel discharged November 1, 1912 to January 1, 1960.

There are numerous work a rounds – including searching at the state level.

PowerPoint from 2015 Find Your Past Conference:
Finding your World War I Veteran at the National Archives at St. Louis by Theresa Fitzgerald

Following her advice I found on Ancestry:
• New York, Abstracts of World War I Military Service, 1917-1919
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>NYS Military Service Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lyons, John T.</strong></th>
<th><strong>1,904,251</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Surname)</td>
<td>(Army serial number)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Christian name)</td>
<td>* White * Colored:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Street and house number)</td>
<td><strong>New York</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Town or city)</td>
<td>(County)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(State)</td>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Enlisted * R. A. * N. G. * E. R. C. * Inducted at **New York, N. Y.** on **Sept 29, 1917**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth:</th>
<th><strong>Kerry Co., Ireland</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age or date of birth:</td>
<td><strong>23 3/12 yrs</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>16 Co. 132 Dep Brig to Oct 29/17; Go A 321 MG Bn to Discharge.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades, with date of appointment:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pvt 1cl Nov 21/17.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wounded in action (degree and date):</th>
<th><strong>Degree undetermined Oct 16, 1918</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Served overseas from †</th>
<th><strong>May 3/18 to † Jan 3/19</strong>, from † to †</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* Honorably discharged on demobilization: **Feb 4/19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In view of occupation he was, on date of discharge, reported ___ per cent disabled.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remarks:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Form No. 724-9, A. G. O. * Strike out words not applicable. † Dates of departure from and arrival in the U. S. |

# UNITED STATES ARMY IN THE WORLD WAR, 1917–1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volume 1</td>
<td>Organization of the American Expeditionary Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 2</td>
<td>Policy-forming Documents of the American Expeditionary Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 3</td>
<td>Training and Use of American Units With the British and French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 4–9</td>
<td>Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 10</td>
<td>The Armistice Agreement and Related Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 11</td>
<td>American Occupation of Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 12–15</td>
<td>Reports of the Commander-in-Chief, AEF, Staff Sections and Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 16</td>
<td>General Orders, GHQ, AEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 17</td>
<td>Bulletins, GHQ, AEF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
John Lyons
Enlistment Record

82nd Division
164th Brigade
Company A of
321st Machine Gunnery Battalion

Battles fought:
- Battle of Lorraine
  - Now Battle of Cantigny
- Battle of Saint-Mihiel
- 3rd Battle of Verdun
  - Now Meuse-Argonne Offensive

Medals:
- Victory Medal
- Ribbon

Payment:
- $63.15
Honorable Discharge from The United States Army

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify, that John J. Lyons, born October 20th 1894, was enlisted in the United States Army on July 10th, 1918, at Camp Meade, Maryland, and is hereby honorably discharged from the military service of the United States by reason of the excusal of the above-named soldier under Act of Congress signed by President Wilson.

Said John J. Lyons was born in County Kerry, in the State of Ireland. When enlisted he was 23 years of age and by occupation a laborer. He had grey eyes, dark hair, fair complexion, and was 5 feet 6 inches in height.

Sworn to under my hand at Camp Meade, this 21st day of February, one thousand nine hundred and nineteen.

Washington, D.C., March 5th, 1919.

Paid $50. under Act of Congress, approved February 24th, 1919.

E. E. Gray, Major, Q.M. Corps.
In May, 1918 Congress passed and act that gave any alien serving in the military or naval services at that time the right to file for citizenship without making the preliminary declaration of intention or proof of five years of residency in the United States. Many soldiers took advantage of this offer.

Ancestry:
- U.S., World War I Soldier Naturalizations, 1918
- Washington D. C., Military Naturalization Petitions, 1918-1924

Family Search Wiki on WWI and Naturalization
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office was founded in 1930 as the Veterans Administration uniting three government agencies:

- The Veterans’ Bureau
- The Bureau of Pensions
- National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers

The name was later changed to the Department of Veterans Affairs

Family Search offers access to:

- United States Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907-1933
  - [https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1832324](https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1832324)

Do not forget that many records were destroyed by fire in the St. Louis Center in 1973.
Ancestry offers:

**U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010**

The BIRLS (Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem) Death File is a Veterans Benefits Administration database that lists information for deceased individuals who had received benefits from the Veterans Administration while they were alive. These include veterans who received educational benefits and veterans’ survivors who applied for benefits. Details listed in the index can include:

- name (provided by cross-referencing the Social Security Number with the Social Security Death Index)
- gender
- birth date
- death dates
- Social Security Number
- cause of death (unknown, natural, combat, other)
- branch(es) of service
- enlistment date(s)
- release date(s)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Name:</strong></th>
<th>John Lyons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender:</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth Date:</strong></td>
<td>16 Apr 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Death Date:</strong></td>
<td>9 Mar 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SSN:</strong></td>
<td>[redacted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Branch:</strong></td>
<td>ARMY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enlistment Date:</strong></td>
<td>19 Sep 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Release Date:</strong></td>
<td>3 Jun 1919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source Information:**

**Description:**
This index contains birth and death dates for more than 14 million veterans and VA beneficiaries who served during the years 1860–2010.

More...
Prisoners-of-War Agency
International Committee of the Red Cross historical archives

- In August 1914, the ICRC established the International Prisoners-of-War Agency. Combatant countries were required to submit lists of prisoners.
- The Agency received 400,000 pages of documents: lists of prisoners’ names and records of capture, of transfers between camps and of deaths in detention.
- For each name listed, the Agency made out an index card. The cards were then classified by nationality and the detainee’s military or civilian status and filed alphabetically in 29 different card indexes.
- These indexes also contain enquiry cards, drawn up on the basis of data taken from the thousands of written requests for information submitted daily by relatives of the missing, which the Agency indexed before destroying the correspondence.
- The Agency’s archives hold 5 million index cards, containing data on 2 million prisoners, primarily from the Western, Romanian and Serbian Fronts.

- https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/
Did They Die in the War?

There were over 8 million combat deaths and Missing In Action in WW I. The United States suffered over 53,000 dead and MIA.

Casualty Records

- *Soldiers of the Great War*
  - Online in Google Books
  - Also as an Ancestry database that is searchable

- *Officers and Enlisted Men of the United States Navy Who Lost Their Lives during the World War, from April 6, 1917 to November 11, 1918.* (Internet Archive)

- Other resources are available. Look!
Where are they Buried?

• Are they buried in the United States in a national cemetery?
  • US Department of Veterans Affairs – National Cemetery Administration
    Gravesite locator http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/

• Are they buried overseas?
  • American Battle Monuments Commission
    https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials

• Don’t forget Find A Grave
  • John Lyons Burial (Nora Higgins Lyons):
    Burial: Calvary Cemetery
    Woodside
    Queens County
    New York, USA
The 1918 influenza pandemic killed an estimated 50 million people.
One fifth of the world's population was attacked by this deadly virus.
It was known as the Spanish Influenza.
It was most virulent in people in their teens and twenties.
The first mild outbreak was noted in a military camp in Kansas in early 1918. It spread through Army camps and American troops brought the disease to Europe when they shipped out that summer and a more virulent strain was brought back to the United States in the fall of 1918.
It struck hardest in the northeast and then spread south and west through the US. Over 4,000 people died in one week in October in Philadelphia.
The best way to determine if your doughboy ancestor died in this pandemic is to locate their death certificate. The cause of death will be the indicator.
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Women in World War I

In World War I over 30,000 women joined the Army and Navy Nurse Corps and other services. Some were recruited even before the war in anticipation of service.

During the course of the war, 21,480 American Army nurses and 1,476 U.S Navy nurses served in military hospitals in the United States and overseas.

More than 400 American military nurses died in during World War I. The vast many in the Influenza Pandemic of 1918.

• US Army Nurse Corps established 1901
• U.S. Navy Nurse Corps established 1908

The first enlisted military service by women occurred in World War I
• U.S. Navy Yeomen (F)
• U.S. Marine Corps Women’s Reserve

Information about women in the military can be found in the same sources as that for males

• Also look for Pension records for widows and other Dependents

Do not forget that many records were destroyed by fire in the St. Louis Center in 1973.
During World War I, a flag with a gold star identified families who had lost soldiers. Women were designated "Gold Star" mothers and/or widows. Between 1930 and 1933, the United States government took 6,654 Gold Star women to visit their sons’ and husbands’ graves in American cemeteries in Belgium, England, and France.

• A list of who was eligible was published.

• Ancestry offers an index:

U.S. World War I Mothers' Pilgrimage, 1929
With his oldest son
John Lyons, Jr.
[First Communion?]
c. 1929
In Flanders Fields

By Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, MD (1872-1918) Canadian Army

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.
Additional Resources used

• Family Search Wiki

• Images courtesy of:
  • Library of Congress – World War I collections
  • Nora Quinlan