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America's Citizen Soldiers

Vietnam Veterans Against the War marched to a Peace Rally at BGSU on October 23, 1972. University Archives Photograph Collection. 



Whenever the United States has been involved in war, civilians have filled the ranks of both combat and support troops. Large troop commitments affected every facet of life at home, from politics to the family circle. Because wartime was such an intense experience, the troops involved often felt inspired to record their impressions, not only through letters home, but also in journals (sometimes kept through combat), photographs, scrapbooks, and later memoirs. Their families preserved these war-related writings,

adding their own diaries and letters from the time, even when they did not preserve their peace-time papers. Many such valuable resources are available to researchers at the Center for Archival Collections.

Soldiers' letters and journals are most commonly found in family papers. Lonely young men far away from home, perhaps for the first time, wrote as often as they were able and eagerly awaited news from home. During the Civil War when military units were recruited from particular geographical regions, brothers, cousins, and neighbors served together. The letters they sent and received were shared widely. Over two dozen such collections are available at the CAC, many from men serving in the same unit. Examples include the George Kryder Papers (**MS 163**) and the Isaac Skillman Papers (MMS 1083) of the Third Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, or the papers of William Shanks (MMS 1172), Samuel Linton (MMS 1070), and Liberty Warner (**MS 624**) of the 21st Ohio Volunteer Infantry. They supplement one another, detailing camp life, military supplies, troop movements, events of battle, and news about other soldiers. Letters from home such as the Webb Family Papers (**MS 518**) or the Hill Family Papers (**MS 190**) have also been preserved, providing a glimpse of daily life in northwest Ohio.

Journals reflect day-by-day the soldiers' experiences and impressions and often were used by survivors when they wrote their memoirs or compiled regimental histories. Each war has produced its share of such documents, and a comparison between wars is interesting in itself. Enlistments in the Civil War ranged from as short as one month, three months, 100 days, or up to three years. Training often consisted of parade drills when the unit was encamped. During the First and Second World War, however, troops were assigned to permanently-established units according to the needs of the armed forces. Minimum enlistments of "two years or the duration" and extended training in boot camp provided troops with the skills and experience to perform effectively in combat and efficiently behind the lines.

The G. I. Bill gave thousands of World War II veterans the opportunity to attend college. The gymnasium at BGSU was put to use as a dormitory to house the flood of new students. University Archives Photograph Collection. ➡

Mary Francis Goldman Klein (MS 197), Josephine Suter Kronfield (MMS 364) and Annie Laurie Turnbull Panning (MS 241) were among the women to serve in the WACs and the WAVES during World War II. Their letters and scrapbooks provide a unique perspective on military service and the changing roles of women. Collections of letters from this period often include "V-Mail." Letters written on standard stationery were microfilmed for shipment



overseas and an enlargement was printed for the recipient.

A generation later, tours of duty in Vietnam were limited to one year. Thousands of Americans served in that conflict. Their letters and journals, as always, will play a vital part in helping future generations to understand the evolving attitudes during that troubled period. The Carroll Lanning Collection (MMS 1030) consists of over 400 color slides taken by a member of the Army Corps of Engineers during one tour of duty in 1969-1970.



➡ Homeward-bound troops were greeted by Red Cross workers during a rest stop in Defiance in April 1919. Edward Bronson Photograph Collection (MS 454)

Also of interest are the records of organizations which provided services to soldiers, veterans, and their families. The American Red Cross chapters in Wood County (MS 410) and Sandusky County (MS 48) are two examples. Veterans' organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic, with posts in

Upper Sandusky (MMS 1139) and Bowling Green (MS 520), or the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6909 of Toledo (MS 161), became focal points for peace-time social activities.

Wartime made everyone feel in closer touch with history. The experiences they recorded—in battle, behind the lines, and at home—provide us with a portrait of their times, from the everyday routine to the extraordinary events which changed the shape of our world.

—Lee N. McLaird

Local Government Records and the Military

Since the end of the Civil War, Ohio state and local governments have provided assistance to veterans and their families. The surviving records created as a result of this work may be found in a variety of government offices throughout northwest Ohio and at the Center for Archival Collections.

The County Auditor conducted an *Enumeration of Soldiers and Sailors*, which lists living veterans who had served in the Mexican, Civil, and Spanish-American Wars, and the Philippine Insurrection. The records include the veteran's name, branch of service, and address.

The County Recorder maintains a record of honorably discharged soldiers and veteran burials. The *Soldiers' Discharge Record* includes the soldier's full name and address, rank, age or date of birth, and service assignment. The *Soldiers' Grave Record* includes the soldier's name, branch of service, dates of birth and death, and place of burial.

The Soldiers' Relief Commission was originally established in 1886 to provide aid to indigent Union veterans and the widows and children of deceased veterans. Records generated by the commission include *Bonus Applications* for veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam; *Burial Applications and Records*; *Headstone Applications*; and various relief records. Records of relief granted by the Soldiers' Relief Commission also can be found in the County Auditor's office.

The Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, located in Sandusky, was established in 1886 for all disabled, indigent, honorably discharged United States soldiers and sailors who are citizens of the state. Records of the Home include *Applications for Admission*, *Death and Burial Records*, *Medical Records*, military histories, and in some cases, personal papers of residents. The death records of the home (1889-1983) are available at the CAC.

The Ohio State Department of Health maintains *Veterans' Burial Records*. Arranged by counties, then by name, the lists contain the veterans' branch of service, birth and death dates, and place of burial. The CAC holdings include lists from May 1941 through December 1981. The State Adjutant General's office maintains a card file of veteran burials in Ohio. The cards contain the same information as found on the Department of Health lists.

The federal government retains numerous records relating to veterans. Bounty land, military service, and pension records, the 1890 Special Enumeration of Union veterans and widows, and the records of the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers are just a few of the many existing records which are available at the National Archives and other major research libraries.

—Stephen M. Charter