



National Museum of the American Sailor
Building 42, 610 Farragut Avenue
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Introduction to U.S. Naval History Research

The National Museum of the American Sailor guides researchers in their personal or professional research into U.S. Navy history using published books and articles, unpublished manuscripts and archives, and artifacts in Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) holdings. The museum cannot perform research for an individual or group, due to limited staffing and the complexity of historical sources. If your research involves substantial exploration of a naval history subject, our staff may be able to guide you in your search for original historical sources, but research remains the researcher's responsibility.

Many researchers can find answers to their own questions by following these steps in the research process. Sometimes, though, a specific question needs to be discussed with a museum staff expert. An example of a specific question to ask the museum staff directly is "Does the museum have a boot camp graduation photograph for WAVES at Bainbridge Naval Training Station in 1951?"

This introduction explains what you can do on your own, and when you need to ask for expert help.

Define What You are Researching

Historical research can be great fun, but the fun requires an investment of effort up front on your part. Make sure you define (1) who or what you specifically are researching; (2) where the person lived or the subject occurred; (3) when did the subject of your research happen or exist; (4) how did any changes occur; (5) what are you trying to uncover or prove? Write down for your own reference your answers to those five points. They will serve as "talking points" when you interact with librarians, archivists, and museum collections managers.

Start Your Research in Libraries

Many naval historical research subjects already are researched and published in books, articles, encyclopedia entries, and digital publications. Before you send inquires about historical materials, you first will want to compile a list of published books, videos, encyclopedias, and other media in public and academic libraries. Your public library's reference librarian can guide you in searching the library's online public access catalog. The Naval History and Heritage Command offers bibliographies about naval history research topics: <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/bibliographies.html>. Many naval history books are also published by the Naval Institute Press (<http://www.usni.org/store/books>) and by university presses.

If your research project is a more specialized subject for a scholarly or school paper, a documentary film or media broadcast, or an exhibit, the Naval History and Heritage Command also provides introductory research guides at <http://www.history.navy.mil/research.html>. You may also want to search back issues of the popular magazine *Naval History*, the more formal *Proceedings Magazine* (formerly *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute*) (<http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings>), and



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citations of articles and dissertations in the academic research databases *America: History and Life* (for U.S. history subjects) or *Historical Abstracts* (for world history articles relating to U.S. Navy topics). Some libraries also provide access to a database of full-text articles, JSTOR. Some libraries also provide access to digitized, keyword-searchable newspaper articles through databases from companies such as *Proquest*. Consult with a reference librarian at your public library or a college or university library for help in finding and searching these databases.

If Needed, Dig Deeper in Archival and Artifact Collections

Many common research questions can be answered in libraries. But if you already searched published books, videos, articles, and other convenient sources and still have questions, you may need to examine unpublished archival collections to uncover long-forgotten facts. The Naval History and Heritage Command has archival collections at the Navy Archives in Washington, D.C., and at several Navy museums around the country, including the National Museum of the American Sailor. The NHHC provides a brief orientation about its headquarters archival and artifact collections at <http://www.history.navy.mil/research.html>. Individual U.S. Navy museums, listed at <http://www.history.navy.mil/visit-our-museums.html>, also have archival and artifact collections. ***The National Museum of the American Sailor's sizable archival collections are currently being inventoried and are closed to public examination. The Museum may be able to provide limited information about archival materials in its collection as the museum staff works towards public accessibility.***

Most official records of the U.S. Navy, including personnel records about individuals, are preserved in the National Archives and Records Administration in archival repositories across the nation. The National Museum of the American Sailor does not have files about individual sailors. The National Museum of the American Sailor does have incomplete, donation-formed collections of boot camp graduation photographs (ca. 1911-2000) and graduation yearbooks (ca. 1947-2004). The National Museum of the American Sailor can provide a research pathfinder if you are researching family history or historical biography about a U.S. Navy enlisted sailor.

The National Museum of the American Sailor asks researchers to use a *Researcher Inquiry Form* (which follows these instructions) to record and communicate inquiries about accessing and using unique historical materials. Normally, the National Museum of the American Sailor can respond to a *Researcher Inquiry Form* within 60 days of receipt.



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Researcher Inquiry Form

Normally, a request for research use of collections can be answered within 60 days of receipt.

Today's Date: _____ Date Response Desired: _____

Your Name: _____

School/Institution/Business/Profession: _____

Department: _____

Postal Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State/Province: _____ ZIP/Postal Code: _____

County (if not U.S.): _____

Phone: () - _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Do you intend to publish or broadcast the information or images from your research? **Yes / No**
If you intend to publish items from the collection, please ask the staff to provide a permissions request form.

Describe your research subject and what you hope to find in U.S. Navy historical collections about enlisted sailors. Please be specific and include full names, dates, places. Explain and name the titles of other published materials and unpublished historical sources you already have examined.
