

EXPLORING THE *OFFICIAL RECORDS* OF THE CIVIL WAR  
VCGS Wednesday Genealogy Class

- ❖ Title: *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, aka “the OR.”
  - ❖ ORN = *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*
  - ❖ ORA = *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*
- ❖ Read more about it at the National Archives website, <http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/military/civil-war-armies-records.html>, or the U.S. Military Academy Library at West Point’s library guide, <http://usma.libguides.com/>, topic: “Civil War Era.”

How it’s organized:

- Series I: Military Operations
  - Orders & reports in chronological order, 53 volumes, 65 chapters, each is titled
- Series II: Prisoners of war
  - Correspondence & reports in chronological order, 8 volumes
- Series III: Union correspondence
- Series IV: Confederate correspondence not included in previous series.

Online Access:

- Ohio State University’s eHistory website: <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/sources/> (OCR text only; single search option)
- Cornell University’s “Making of America” website: <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moa> (images; multiple search options)
- New on Ancestry.com: *Official records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861-1865* under “U.S. Military Records” → “Histories.” Direct URL is: <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1203> (search engine set up for name search).

How to construct search terms:

1. Gather information on the soldier, unit, company, places of service (battles, locations), and note any brigade/commander assignments.
  - a. NPS database, Fold3, etc.
  - b. Check out regimental histories online and in library collections.
2. Compose a list of potential search terms focusing on the **name of the unit** (with number spelled out, with hyphen), **battles with dates, locations/place names, unit officers**.

Guide for searching Cornell’s website:

1. On Search page, under Collection, click on “uncheck all” then click on the first collection only, “Books: Civil War Official Histories.”
2. Top of page, the default value for “Search in” is “full text” – leave it at that.
3. Put in your search term in the “Find” box (word or short phrase). *Use Boolean or Proximity searches for narrowing search.*
4. Navigate with “previous” & “next” buttons, “Results List” to see hits, “Search results” to go back.
5. TIPS:
  - a. Spell out numbers for military units: “ninety-third” vs “93<sup>rd</sup>”
  - b. Use OR index to prioritize results: battles in Series I, vol./dates