Tips for finding answers in World War II military records on Ancestry.com

Start your search for World War II-related records by visiting www.ancestry.com/military, where you’ll find all of the collections in one place. Having problems? Refine your search with the following tips.

1. **Check birth years.** Draft ages during World War II extended from ages 18 to 45. Search for people born between approximately 1897 and 1926 (give or take a few years) in both draft cards and enlistment records. You’ll also find men born between the ages of 45 and 64 in the fourth registration, a.k.a. the “old man’s draft”; note, however, that this group was never drafted.

2. **Use the right name.** Your relative may have gone by a nickname – but family members living today may know the given name, which is also likely to be the name used in military documents.

3. **Look for clues to help you determine if you’ve found the right person.** Military records may include hometown or place of enlistment, birth year and even the name of another family member (select “View Image” to see all details). Compare this to information you know about your family member already. If it fits, be sure to save it to your family tree. Don’t have enough information yet to continue your search? Save the record to your computer or Ancestry.com shoebox and try the next tip.

4. **Jump backwards.** Remember, people you find in WWII military records at Ancestry.com will have left other trails at Ancestry.com. If the WWII military record is the first record you discover for this person on Ancestry.com, use its details to help you search for a 1930 census record (remember, he’ll be 12-15 years younger), or a passenger list if the person is a recent immigrant. Also look for yearbooks, birth and marriage records, city directories and family trees.
Five Clues in a World War II Draft Card

Draft cards can point you to your next step. See how we used a card from the U.S. WWII Draft Cards collection to discover more answers and more records.

1. Birth date
Use birth date plus James’s name to locate his gravestone in Honolulu, Hawaii, Punchbowl National Cemetery, 1941-2011. Details on the tombstone reveal he was a staff sergeant in the 417th Bombardment Group, U.S. Army Air Force, when he died.

2. Birthplace and residence
Birthplace and residence will narrow down search results for James in the 1930 U.S. Federal Census. Two James Fradys born in the 1920s live in Buncombe County, North Carolina in 1930. Only one of them, though, has a middle initial “F.” The birth year isn’t identical to the one listed on the draft card but it is close, making it worth checking into further.

3. Birth details
Birthplace points to the North Carolina Birth Index, 1800-2000, where James F. Frady is listed with a birthdate exactly two years later than the draft card shows. His father’s name is William Howard Frady, matching the 1930 census. But why the birth year discrepancy? James may have lied about his age because he was eager to serve – plus to register for this draft, James had to be born on or before June 30, 1924 (you’ll find the date range at the top of the draft card).
4. Enlistment date
Draft cards don’t mean someone was drafted — just that the person registered. (The World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942, is a great example. It registered men between the ages of 45 and 64, but none were drafted as a result.) Such is the case with James. Searching the military collections at Ancestry.com shows that James F. Frady enlisted in the Army Air Corps just few months after he filled out this card, before he was ever drafted.

5. Name of someone who will always know your address
Typically a spouse, parent or sibling is listed as the contact — so who is Mrs. W.B. Scott? Working under the assumption that James’s mother remarried after the 1930 census also assumes something happened to James’s father. Sure enough it had: a search of the birth, marriage and death collection on Ancestry.com for William H. Frady using info from the 1930 census (born in North Carolina in 1893) surfaces a death certificate from 1932. The wife’s name, Ella, matches. And the death certificate adds a new generation to search — William’s parents’ names and other details are included.