Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Records of World War II Prisoners of War, 1942 – 1947

Record Group 389

Updated May 20, 2020

1. What information is in these records?
2. Why were these records created?
3. Does the file contain records for all prisoners of war?
4. How can I access a copy of the full file?

1. What information is in these records?

These records about U.S. military officers and soldiers and US. and some Allied civilians who were prisoners of war and internees provide serial number, personal name, branch of service or civilian status, grade, date reported, race, state of residence, type of organization, parent unit number and type, place of capture (theater of war), source of report, status, detaining power, and prisoner of war or civilian internee camp code.

Records of prisoners of the Japanese who died also document whether the prisoner was on a Japanese ship that sank or if he or she died during transport from the Philippine Islands to Japan.

2. Why were these records created?

The Office of the Provost Marshal General used reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross to generate monthly reports on U.S. military and civilian prisoners of war and internees, and some Allied internees.

3. Does the file contain records for all prisoners of war?

No. In some cases, for unknown reasons, there are no records for some prisoners of war whose names appear in the lists or cables transmitted to the Office of the Provost Marshal General by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In addition, a small percentage of the original punch cards or other types of cards could not be converted to a contemporary digital format and included in the file because of the poor condition of the cards. Instead, staff have scanned the photocopies of these punch cards or other types of cards and make them available via AAD as part of the scanned technical documentation for these records.

4. How can I access a copy of the full file?

The raw data file, along with the associated technical documentation, may be downloaded from the National Archives Catalog at: https://catalog.archives.gov/. There you can search by the series name, Records of World War II Prisoners of War, or using the National Archives Identifier 583428, which is the description identifier for this series.

In the results, select to view the full series description. Click on the link "file(s) described in the catalog" next to "Includes:" for a list of the file units within this series. Then select the file unit containing the records of interest to you. The file unit description will include the list of electronic records and documentation files available for viewing and/or downloading.

Additional information about downloading electronic records from the Catalog is available at: https://www.archives.gov/research/electronic-records/access-in-catalog-faqs.

Please keep in mind that the data file consists of the raw structured data as loaded into AAD (i.e. the coded values without meanings), but without the AAD software that displays the meanings for coded values and field titles. For more details about using files containing raw structured data, you may wish to review our "Introduction to Raw Data" at: https://www.archives.gov/files/research/electronic-records/raw-data-intro.pdf.