

# Research Guide: Hero Cards “Submit a Hero”

*Before we publish a Hero’s story and card, we must gather their life details and verify (document) that we have the facts correct. The more details and verification sources you can help us gather, the faster that Hero’s story can be written, confirmed, and published. We are responsible for the accuracy of all written content, as it is distributed in schools across the country. We also owe it to these Heroes to care deeply about preserving their stories accurately for future generations.*

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Because we are a publisher whose content is used in schools, **we do not copy-paste written text sent to us**, and we do not publish details without verification. **We will write the story.** Your help is needed to *gather and verify the facts*.

What does it take to write a *true* story that captures a person’s life as fully as possible in one brief online page—a story that adequately honors their service and sacrifice, and introduces them to the people who benefit from that sacrifice?

The “fill in the blank” information on our [Submit a Hero page](#) includes only the basics that will appear on a Hero’s *card*. However, every card leads to that Hero’s *story*. As you do your research, consider what details about that individual will be useful to help us tell their story. Note that we’re not looking for you to simply *send us the answers* to these questions. Rather, we’re looking for **documentation that will verify** these answers.

*You can help us to gather and verify:*

## 1. Connection to a family member

If you are not a family member yourself, are you able to find an email address or phone number for someone in the Hero’s family? Family members are a great source for many of the items listed below and may have letters from the Hero, medals, citations, photos, and knowledge about details not found in online documents. When possible, we also want to make sure they’re involved in honoring their loved one, and in confirming the story details.

*One note of caution:* We do not approach family members whose loss is somewhat recent—within the last 20 years. We want to be respectful of their privacy, and we understand that everyone has their own timeline for processing the loss of a loved one. If you know a family member and obtain their consent to proceed, only then will we contact and interview them. Family members can contact us at any time, and family-submitted Heroes are moved to the front of the line.

## 2. A print-quality photo

A photo found online will look grainy/blurry when printed. Whenever we can obtain a higher resolution scan or smartphone photo of an original, we can more likely produce a printed card

that shows the Hero clearly. If you can, provide us with more than one option. Photos used on Hero Cards should have the Hero in a military uniform, with no other people included in the shot (unless we can remove them). Formal military portraits will work, but candid shots in service are preferred—as they’re more relatable.

As with all submitted information, please indicate where you obtained the photo image so we can ensure that we have permission to publish it. In cases where no photo of the individual exists, we will produce artwork to represent them. This is not ideal as it requires more time and doesn’t show the actual person—but it is sometimes the only option.

### **3. The Hero’s name**

You’d think this would be simple! We’ll use the Hero’s full name, but also take care to ensure that within the story, we use the name used by his/her family: “Tom” vs. “Thomas,” or “Marge” vs. “Margaret” for example. With some Heroes, you’ll see their name shown on the card as John P. “Peter” Smith—if the family normally referred to him as “Peter.” When in doubt, we’ll use the name shown on a Hero’s grave marker, assuming that is how the family wants them to be remembered.

### **4. Family background**

We do our best to include:

1. Their parents’ names, along with siblings’ names and where the Hero lands in the birth order. These details can typically be found in a published obituary.
2. Their spouse’s name, including maiden name. Where and how did they meet? When were they married?
3. Their children’s names.

### **5. Schools**

Where did the Hero attend grade school, high school, and college? What year did they graduate high school and/or college? Did they participate in sports, music, etc? If they did attend college, what was their area of study?

### **6. Future plans, motivations**

We won’t speculate on what a Hero was thinking. But if family members, letters home, or published articles mention the Hero’s college major—or plans to pursue a certain career (before or after military service)—we will include those details in the story. Were they drafted into military service, or did they enlist? If the latter, what motivated them to join and why did they choose the branch in which they served?

### **7. Hobbies & interests**

The idea behind publishing these Heroes’ stories is to convey that they were *real people with real families*. If friends or family members recall that he/she loved working on cars, music, hunting/fishing, sports, etc.—these details help to paint a fuller picture of the Hero’s life.

## 8. Jobs

We can include anything from a paper route as a child to jobs they worked before joining the military, including the names of their employers' companies.

## 9. Military journey

Where were they sent for basic training (dates)? Where were they sent for specialized training (dates)? What military unit(s), ships, aircraft, bases, etc. were part of their military journey? When and where were they deployed? What was their assignment? In which battles or operations did they serve or support?

## 10. Documents

The answers to many of the questions above can be found in a variety of reliable sources. For some questions—such as hobbies, schools, why they joined the military, etc.—a family member's recollection will suffice. We can write it as "According to his sister..." The best sources for verifying other details include:

- ❖ Newspaper accounts and magazine articles (include the publication and date)
- ❖ Military websites
- ❖ Obituaries (include the publication and date)
- ❖ Military citations
- ❖ Military documents such as registration cards, incident reports, or death notices
- ❖ Letters home
- ❖ Published books

## 11. Grave markers and memorials

Photos of grave markers can verify the correct spelling of a Hero's name, their age, the date of their loss, military honors received, units in which they served, etc. Monuments that show their name can confirm a battle in which they served or the location of their death.

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## Good places to look (Sources)...

At the bottom of every Hero story page, we list the *Sources* for that biography. [See example >](#) . You can start your research with a simple online search, looking for results that show reliable sources—newspaper accounts, magazine articles, published books, military branch websites, museums, monuments/memorials,

### Crowd-sourced websites

***It is not proper research*** to use crowd-sourced websites, personal blogs, or social media posts as an authoritative source for facts and details. However, crowd-sourced websites like [Wikipedia.org](#) can *lead you to better sources* or alert you to a fact that you can verify

elsewhere. At the bottom of every Wikipedia article is a list of “External links” that can list acceptable sources. You may see on Wikipedia that a Hero was awarded a Bronze Star Medal. You can then seek out a more reliable source to confirm that fact. The more reliable source is the one we’ll list on the Hero’s page.

[Findagrave.com](http://Findagrave.com) is also a crowd-sourced website. But it may include a photo of a Hero’s headstone or text from an obituary—giving you the actual source (newspaper name and date) to obtain as a definitive source.

**Personal blogs or social media platforms** can also lead to quotes from family members, contact information, charitable foundations, photos (permissions required), or a Hero’s memorial page managed by the family. Much like Wikipedia and Find a Grave, it’s important not to use these as authoritative sources—but use them as *a starting point to lead you* to more reliable sources.

## Research links

Below is a list of some online sources—certainly not an extensive list! Crowd-sourced websites are indicated with an asterisk (\*). *See the precautions above.* In addition to a simple online search, you can search these individual websites with the Hero’s name (all possible variations), battle/operation names, ships, aircraft, citations, etc.

### Information on individuals:

- ❖ [Newspapers.com](http://Newspapers.com) (requires paid membership or library access)
- ❖ [Fold3.com](http://Fold3.com) (requires paid membership or library access)
- ❖ [Findagrave.com](http://Findagrave.com)\*
- ❖ [HonorStates.org](http://HonorStates.org)\*
- ❖ [Together We Served](http://Together We Served)\*
- ❖ [Korean War Project](http://Korean War Project)\*
- ❖ [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund](http://Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund)\*
- ❖ [Faces of the Fallen \(War on Terror\), \*The Washington Post\*](http://Faces of the Fallen (War on Terror), The Washington Post)
- ❖ [Military Times—Honor the Fallen](http://Military Times—Honor the Fallen)
- ❖ [Military Times—The Hall of Valor \(military award citations\)](http://Military Times—The Hall of Valor (military award citations))
- ❖ [Traces of War](http://Traces of War)
- ❖ [Arlington National Cemetery](http://Arlington National Cemetery) (unofficial, use Search for individuals)\*

### General information:

- ❖ [National Archives](http://National Archives)
- ❖ [Digital Public Library of America](http://Digital Public Library of America)
- ❖ [Library of Congress](http://Library of Congress)
- ❖ [Veterans History Project \(Library of Congress\)](http://Veterans History Project (Library of Congress))
- ❖ [Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency \(DPAA\)](http://Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA))
- ❖ [U.S. Army Center of Military History](http://U.S. Army Center of Military History)
- ❖ [Naval History and Heritage Command](http://Naval History and Heritage Command)
- ❖ [Air Force Historical Research Agency](http://Air Force Historical Research Agency)

- ❖ [Marine Corps History Division](#)
- ❖ [United States Coast Guard Historian's Office](#)
- ❖ [American Battlefield Trust](#)
- ❖ [American Battle Monuments Commission](#)
- ❖ [History Channel](#)
- ❖ [Wikipedia.org\\*](#)

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*Thank you for helping us to gather, preserve, and share the stories of those who gave “the last full measure of devotion” for our freedom! Please send all Sources to [info@gratefulnation.us](mailto:info@gratefulnation.us). It is important to remember that we don't accept copy-pasted text. We're instead looking for Sources in the form of URLs, image (photo) files, and scans of documents.*

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