National Archives Researcher Forum – Washington, D.C., Area
Friday, November 18, 2011
Lecture Rooms A/B, Archives II

<u>Welcome/Administrative Business</u>

Jennifer (Jen) Nelson, Special Assistant to Chief Operating Officer Tom Mills, and Acting Executive for Research Services, welcomed everyone to the Researcher Forum and addressed several administrative issues with the group.

- *Posting of Meeting Material*s: The day's meeting notes will be posted within two weeks of the November 18 meeting date on the Researcher Forum web page (http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-forum/) to allow for the intervening holiday. The PowerPoint presentation, a commemorative issue produced by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on the National Archives at St. Louis, and a description of NARA communication tools for researchers will appear under the *Handouts* heading on the page.

- *Future Researcher Forum Agenda Items*: The audience agreed that the call for agenda items would be posted on the Researcher Forum page and could continue to be distributed via Marie's e-mail blasts. Ideas could be submitted, as usual, to NARA customer service or reference managers or to Jen Nelson.

- *Space Update*: The reconfiguration of Archives I researcher space is on schedule. To view the schedule, see the PowerPoint presentation posted online on the Researcher Forum web page and on the monitors in the Warner Research Center at Archives I and Archives II lobby.

- *Test Chairs at Archives I*: Researchers are invited to try out a new chair being considered for use in the Warner Research Center. Please use the chair evaluation form available in the center to indicate your comments about the chair or the need for new chairs.

- *Digitization Update*: Researchers were invited to comment on the presentations and outcome of the September 16 Researcher Forum discussion between NARA's digitization partners and participants. Rebecca Warlow, who works in the Open Government office of Information Services and is responsible for coordinating digitization and description activities for NARA, will provide an update from NARA's digitization partners that will be published on the Researcher Forum web page.

  - A researcher stated that researchers should be able to have access to the actual document in addition to the digital copy.   This issue has been addressed by NARA in *Archives 1400, Ch 7, Part 1, Section 4e: Records that have been Reproduced*, as

follows: *Refer researchers requesting access to records that have been reproduced in letterpress or microform publications to the reproductions. Original records are serviced only if (1) legible reproductions cannot be provided or the physical document itself is the object of the study and (2) access to the original records does not endanger the records to be examined.*

- o A researcher had talked to Brian Hansen of Fold3, and they are in the process of responding to researcher concerns. Fold3 has been working on how records can be browsed on its site.
- o Rebecca Warlow concurred that Fold3 is looking at all the issues raised by researchers and fully understands their needs. For instance, as requested at the September meeting, Fold3 has added microfilm roll numbers to the metadata for items, except for items digitized early on when the metadata was not captured. They may also be able to turn that number into some kind of hyperlink that refers back.
- o Researchers did not have suggestions for a follow-up session with partners.

National Archives at St. Louis and Proposed Records Transfer

The main feature of the meeting was a presentation and discussion with the audience about the newly completed National Archives facility at St. Louis, an overview of its operations and how the public requests/receives access to records, and NARA's proposal to transfer certain records series (mostly from Archives II to that facility) for their perpetual preservation, use in reconstructing burned records, and reference service to the public.

Presenters were Ann Cummings, Director of NARA's Textual Archives Services Division; Trevor Plante, Chief of the Archives I Reference Branch; and Bryan McGraw, Director of the National Archives at St. Louis. To view their PowerPoint presentation, please see the *Handouts* section of the November 18 Researcher Forum meeting at http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-forum/.

❖ **Proposed Records Transfer**

Ann Cummings led the discussion on the records proposed for transfer from the Washington, DC, area to St. Louis and NARA's rationale for taking such action (slides 2-5). She emphasized that the records depicted in the chart below complement the mission, function, and holdings of the National Archives at St. Louis and the National Personnel Records Center and that the move will help to alleviate the severe shortage of records storage space at Archives I and Archives II.

Trevor Plante announced that the transfer proposal does not include NARA's civil war pension files (slide 6).

The following series have been identified (slide 3) for proposed transfer to the National Archives at St. Louis from Archives II and Archives I. Total volume is 9,599 cubic feet.

1	Army General Courts Martial Case File 1918-1938 (RG 153 Entry 15-B)	accessioned	College Park	3,615
2	20th Century Military "Burial Case Files" 1915-1939 (RG 92 NM-81 Entry 1942) *Proposed for digitization.	accessioned	College Park	2,730
3	20th Century Military Apps. for Headstones 1925-1963 (RG 92 A1 Entry 2110-C) *Currently being digitized.	accessioned	College Park	288
3A	Department of Memorial Affairs; Applications for Headstones and Markers, 1965-1985 (RG 15 A1 Entry 52) *Proposed for digitization.	accessioned	College Park	466
3B	Interim Control Forms (RG 92 A1 Entry 2110-B) *Currently being digitized.	accessioned	College Park	113
3C	Office of the Chief of Support Services – Memorial Division; Cemetery Branch; Application for Headstones and Markers, 1964-1970 (RG 92 A1 Entry 1942A)*Proposed for digitization.	accessioned	College Park	226
4	Deceased and War Casualty Seaman's Records, 1937-1950 (RG 26 A1 Entry 426)	accessioned	Washington, DC	145
5	Old USMC Enlisted OMPFs "Service Records of Enlisted Men," 1867-1904 (RG 127 A1 Entry 76-A) *Proposed for digitization.	accessioned	Washington, DC	158
6	Panama Canal Railroad Company Official Personnel Files, 1896-1920 (RG 185 A1 Entry 162)	accessioned	College Park	16
7	American Citizen Official Personnel Folders, 1904-1920 (RG 185 A1 Entry 176)	accessioned	College Park	640
8	Panama Canal Official Personnel Folders, 1903-1920 (RG 185 A1 Entry 163)	accessioned	College Park	8
9	German Civilian Personnel Files, European Command (RG 531 UD Entry 999)	accessioned	College Park	26
10	Officer Orders & Officer Personnel Jackets, South Pacific Force (RG 313 UD Entry 1062)	accessioned	College Park	2
11	Merchant Vessel Personnel Division; Card Records of Licenses Issued to Merchant Marine Officers, 1910-1946	accessioned	Washington, DC	60
12	201 Chaplain Files, 1917-1950 (RG 247 NM-3 Entries 484-B; 484-C; 484-D; 484-E; 484-F; 484-G)	accessioned	College Park	1106

❖ **St. Louis Facility and Services**

Bryan McGraw, Director of the National Archives at St. Louis, discussed the recently completed facility, the records and services available to researchers, and the procedures for requesting records and additional information (slides 7-19).

- The National Archives at St. Louis (http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/) is NARA's newest facility, located at 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO (about 15 minutes from the airport). It is the central repository for personnel-related records for both military and civil services and is co-located with the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).

- It is one of the busiest archival units in the National Archives system: over 500,000 cubic feet of archival records currently available to the public (over 2 million cubic feet estimated by 2065), nearly 800 employees, and over 116,000 written reference requests for archival records received in 2011.

- The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* produced a commemorative issue on the facility and its function in conjunction with its dedication; see **http://www.archives.gov/press/press-kits/nprc-st-louis/pdf/nprc-opens-new-facility-2011.pdf**

- Slide 15 (below) shows the records holdings in St. Louis.

National Archives at St. Louis Records Holdings			
Record	Record Group	Cubic Feet	Notes
Civilian Agency Official Personnel Folders (OPFs)	146	213,448	Accessioned 2008
DC National Guard Military Personnel Files (1887 - 1945)	168	88	
USAF Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) (1940 - 1973)	342	273	
USN IDPFs (1964 - 1975)	24	305	
USN Casualty Records (IDPFs)	24	316	
USN Inpatient (Clinical) Record files (Non-fixed Facilities) (1943 - 1945)	52	2,082	
Selective Service System Registration Cards & Ledgers (1940 - 1975) (Various Stat	147	6,164	Also includes 4th Registration (1877 - 1897)
Auxilliary Files (Vouchers, Rosters, Rolls, Morning Reports) (Various Years)	64	19,633	Surrogate record material for OMPFs lost in 1973 Fire)
USN Enlisted World War I OMPFs (1885 - 1939)	24	14,769	Accessioned 2004
USMC Enlisted World War I OMPFs (1905 - 1939)	127	4,363	Accessioned 2004
USN Enlisted World War II (1939 - 1947)	24	84,320	
USA OMPFs (Project 62 annual accessions) (1912 - 1949)	319	99,583	Project 62 began in 2007
USN OMPFs (Project 62) (1902 - 1949)	24	25,134	
USMC OMPFs (Project 62) (1905 - 1949)	127	28,132	
USAF OMPFs (Project 62) (1947 - 1949)	342	8,556	
USCG OMPFs (Project 62) (1898 - 1949)	26	10,963	
USA Persons of Exceptional Prominence (PEPs) OMPFs (Various Years)	319	22	
USN PEPs (Various Years)	24	14	
USMC PEPs (Various Years)	127	14	
USAF PEPs (Various Years)	342	36	
USCG PEPs (Various Years)	26	7	
TOTAL		518,222	

- Slide 16 (below) shows the records that will be transferred to St. Louis from across the NARA system by September 30, 2012.

Records to be Transferred to the National Archives at St. Louis			
Record	Record Group	Cubic Feet	Notes
USA General Courts Martial Case Files (1918 - 1939)	153	3,615	Currently at College Park
USA General Courts Martial Case Files (1940 - 1976)	153	15,178	Transfer to STL completed 30 Sep 11
20th Century Military "Burial Case Files" (1915 - 1939)	92	2,730	Currently at College Park
20th Century Military Applications for Headstones (1925 - 1963)	92	288	Currently at College Park
App. For Headstones & Markers Office of Chief Support Services, Cemetery Branch (1964 - 1970)	92	226	Currently at College Park
Dept. Memorial Affairs; Applications for Headstones & Markers (1965 - 1985)	15	466	Currently at College Park
Interim Control Forms	92	113	Currently at College Park
Deceased & War Casualty Seaman's Records (1937 - 1950)	26	145	Currently at College Park
Old USMC Enlisted OMPFs "Service Records of Enlisted Men" (1867 - 1904)	127	158	Currently at Washington DC, originally in St. Louis
Panama Canal Railroad Company Official Personnel Files (1896 - 1920)	185	16	Currently at College Park, originally in St. Louis
American Citizen Official Personnel Files (1904 - 1920)	185	640	Currently at College Park
Panama Canal Official Personnel Files (1903 - 1920)	163	8	Currently at College Park
German Civilian Personnel Files, European Command	531	26	Currently at College Park
Officer Orders & Officer Personnel Jackets, South Pacific Force	313	2	Currently at College Park
Merchant Vessel Personnel Division; Card Records of Licenses Issued to Merchant Marine Officers, (1910 - 1946)	26	60	Currently at Washington DC
Merchant Mariner Personnel Files	26	14,000	Currently at Suitland
201 Chaplain Files (1917 - 1947)	247	1,106	Currently at College Park
USA & USAF IDPFs (Various Years)	319/342	20,825	Currently at Suitland
Selective Service System Registration Cards & Ledgers (1940 - 1975) (Various States)	147	32,063	Transfer to STL underway. Will be completed by Jan 2012
TOTAL		91,665	

❖ **Questions/Responses**

During the remainder of the meeting, researchers had an opportunity to raise the following questions with presenters:

Researcher: **In the old center, walk-ins were priority; will this continue to be the case in the new facility?** Bryan McGraw responded: it depends on the walk-in. We are still moving records, and the records you seek might not be at Archives Drive. We ask that you call ahead and make a reservation.

Researcher: **I have heard from other researchers that microfilm is very limited, as is the research room, with few desks available. Also it is hard to find records and may take 10 days to even see if you have the records we are requesting**. Bryan McGraw responded: I have not heard that availability is a problem in the research room. And if you or someone else is finding that it takes 10 days to hear back after placing a request for records, contact me directly; we will do everything we can. This is not a stand-alone archives; we have to work around the benefits/entitlements priorities associated with military personnel records. Please call in advance. Approximately 75 to 80 percent of our military personnel records are in our database. Once a record is ordered, we need to determine if it is archival. We also have to determine if the record requires conservation treatment, which may then need

to be undertaken. We next contact the researcher and let them know the status. It should take days, not weeks.

Researcher: I view St. Louis as holding 20th-, not 19th-century military records. These records are tied to other archival record groups, and by taking the military records and sending them to St. Louis, it will be more difficult to do research, and the integrity of military records will be diminished. Bryan McGraw responded: Our oldest military records are from 1841 (Navy), and our oldest civilian personnel folders date from the early 1800s. The U.S. Marine Corps records proposed to be sent to St. Louis fill in a gap of records missing from St. Louis.

Trevor Plante explained: There are two series of Marine Corps case files of enlisted men downtown at Archives I. The first series is by enlistment date, and the second is alphabetical (the second series is proposed for transfer to St. Louis). Although the series title says it goes back to 1867, the bulk of the records cover 1895 to 1905.

Researcher: By taking this action, you will be requiring scholars and researchers to travel around the country. Bryan McGraw responded: The National Archives at St. Louis and NPRC are centralized to serve the entire country—they are national in scope. By moving the proposed records to St. Louis, we would, in fact, be in a better position to support researchers interested in personnel records by having a central location for most of the records sought.

Researcher comment: All the records being sent are name accessible. They complement the records that are out there. I would like to have all the military records together under one roof. It won't happen, but St. Louis has a great facility and a great plan.

Researcher: **Do you anticipate making the research room more accessible and having walk-ins do some work (e.g., morning reports)?** Bryan McGraw responded: researchers should be able to walk in to see those, and that is our goal. We plan to be able to offer walk-in service in the near future after we complete the move of records, which will be concluded by the end of September 2012.

Researcher: What about making the library aids available online? The XC (VA Claim folders of deceased veterans) records would be most valuable. Bryan McGraw responded: I will need to follow up on that. Bear in mind we cannot post Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and FOIA Privacy Exemption information (e.g., Social Security numbers) online. Most of our finding aids are full of PII.

Researcher: Is there talk of moving Vietnam Veteran records? Ann Cummings responded: No, there is none. Bryan McGraw added: military personnel records of the Vietnam era are already in St. Louis among our holdings.

Researcher: Regarding the Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs), moving them to St. Louis from Suitland would greatly limit our access to them. What types of agreements can be made to continue our ready access to these materials? Bryan McGraw responded: we are trying to get a scan-on-demand service together. We are also trying to get the Army IDPF records accessioned. These records are in poor condition—heavily used, and we need to get them in a stable environment. Also, the Army IDPFs are known to have already accessioned Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps IDPFs among them since the Army had responsibility in some locations/theaters for mortuary affairs. The appraisal that designated the IDPF as a permanent/archival record was for all military records of this type from all branches, including the Army. We certainly understand the need to complete the work of the Joint POW/MIA Command, and we want to try to find a way to meet both requirements: solve the cases and also preserve the records for future generations. Our proposal is to offer a scan-on-demand option and get to customers as soon as possible the record material requested. We have an excellent relationship and experience with JPAC in providing record material to them. This proposal, which is being vetted through NARA, would, we feel, provide the excellent service and support to our customers. We are looking forward to discussing this with DoD.

Researcher: In the last two years, requests for Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) have gone up 1000 percent, and we have an increased number of requests. I am concerned about the scale of the problem and don't think you can do scan-on-demand. Bryan McGraw responded: we have a scanning lab, and we have looked at the number of cases and think we can handle it. Obviously this would entail a joint solution agreed to by both parties, NARA and DoD. We would also want to test prior to implementing to ensure the process works.

Researcher: I work for the Defense Joint POW/MIA Command. As far as I understand, on April 14, 2011, the Army said they will not allow NARA to accession these IDPFs. I am very interested in hearing what the proposal is going to be. I find it hard to believe that you will be able to do this. Trevor Plante responded: if it is something that is accessioned by the Archives, they don't need to go through you, they go through Bryan.   Bryan McGraw added: we often get requests from other agencies and have to deal with very short notice priorities. Our proposal is one that we would need to discuss with DoD in detail and work through the particulars. I am optimistic we can find a workable solution for both parties.

Researcher: Families meet with the Army 10 times a year, and we have 3 weeks to provide information on a missing person file, from WWII forward. I think we have to work closely together (our agencies). Bryan McGraw responded: I agree completely. We understand the short deadlines; we deal with this every day at NPRC and want to continue this dialogue.

Researcher: The long-term benefits and preservation of the series in this proposal are good. The folks in Hawaii check records, and Suitland gets the request. Now we will have

copies of the records, and records from several locations will be consolidated in one place. Bryan McGraw responded: we work very closely with the Federal Records Center at NPRC on this very topic, and we need to meet those metrics, those timelines. It should be noted that we receive on average 130 priority requests each day at NPRC, and these must be fulfilled within 48 hours or less. Meeting a 10-day turnaround, as was mentioned, should be attainable.

Other questions or concerns about access to records at St. Louis should be sent directly to Bryan McGraw at bryan.mcgraw@nara.gov . As the archival holdings grow at the NPRC, researchers can help NARA determine, through their comments, how archival operations at St. Louis can best serve both the public and veterans.

Next Meeting of the Researcher Forum

Please join us for the next meeting of the Researcher Forum on *January 27, 2012, at 1:00 p.m. in the National Archives Building in Washington, DC (Archives I)*. Agenda items can be sent to Susan Cummings at susan.cummings@nara.gov, Jen Nelson at jennifer.nelson@nara.gov, or to other NARA customer service or reference managers.

In the meantime:
- Please visit the Researcher Forum page at www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-users-group/ for meeting minutes and upcoming information on changes coming to the Robert M. Warner Research Center at Archives I.
- The NARAtions blog is available for discussion at http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access.
- If you have suggestions for questions we should ask our researchers and the public, please send them to us at socialmedia@nara.gov.

Thank you all for coming.