

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
January 25 - 27, 2012  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Action: Petition to Form a Military Archives Roundtable  
(Prepared by: SAA Members Mike Miller and Jim Ginther)**

A petition to form a Military Archives Roundtable was submitted via e-mail by SAA members Mike Miller and Jim Ginther on December 14, 2011. Additional materials (including the requisite 50 supporting signatures of SAA members) were provided by e-mail beginning on December 2. As of January 4, 2012, 90 SAA members had submitted an e-mail message in support of the formation of a Military Archives Roundtable. SAA staff contacted Miller and Ginther, both of whom indicated that they would be willing to run the first meeting, per the requirement that states: "Someone who is willing to run the first meeting of the Roundtable (usually the person preparing the petition) must also be identified."<sup>1</sup> The following information is supplied by the petitioners in support of formation of a new SAA roundtable.

**Statement of Purpose and Goals of the Military Archives Roundtable**

One of the most common denominators among archival collections is material documenting the history of people touched by the impact of the American military. From government repositories charged with documenting national security policy, to Department of Defense archives chronicling military operational history, to academic institutions compiling collections on the arts, antiwar movements or race and gender issues in the military, to local historical societies collecting the papers of city fathers who did their duty and came home to build a better world on the home front, few other experiences have cut such a wide swath across people, times, places, and nations. Because of this commonality, it is imperative that the public understand the totality and impact of the military experience. It is precisely because so many institutions large and small have materials to contribute to this discussion that a Military Archives Roundtable is vital to bring representatives of collections across this vast spectrum together to share ideas and information, create common descriptive language, and promote greater understanding of the human experience.

**Goals**

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<sup>1</sup>Staff note: As of January 4, 2012, SAA Headquarters ([saahq@archivists.org](mailto:saahq@archivists.org)) received 90 member signatures verified by SAA staff. Staff also verified the petition as complete, fulfilling all requirements for forming a new roundtable..

- To foster dialogue among archivists working with military-related collections and other stakeholders on a wide variety of archival issues, including management, preservation, description, and access to the wide spectrum of materials documenting the impact of military conflict. To facilitate collaboration and information-sharing among archival institutions, universities, governments, legal bodies, and nongovernment agencies that are documenting and preserving records of issues related to the military and military service.
- To advocate for the collection and preservation of materials related to all issues emanating from military activities and to push for fair policies for open access to these resources with due consideration to balancing the very definite public need to know with responsible consideration of national security issues.
- To foster cooperation and leverage the resources, experiences, and ideas of a wide range of professionals, institutions, and stakeholders to establish policies and best practices and address management issues and techniques to benefit the archives profession at large.
- To facilitate the dissemination of information concerning military holdings in repositories to researchers and other repositories.
- To foster cooperation among institutions across this spectrum to specifically devise standardized descriptive nomenclature, access policies, and greater access to military collections by the public at large.

To accomplish these goals, it is vital to establish a formal presence within SAA and create an official venue for the exchange of ideas affecting military archival collections.

- a. Formally create a Military Archives Roundtable.
- b. Initiate and integrate a Military Archives e-mail listserv with other SAA lists.
- c. Develop a Military Archives Roundtable website.
- d. Develop electronic or other social media outlets to share news and publicize events.

### **Statement of Need for a Military Archives Roundtable**

The 2010 International Council on Archives issued a *Universal Declaration on Archives* stating that:

Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life. To this effect, we recognize the unique quality of archives as authentic evidence of

administrative, cultural and intellectual activities and as a reflection of the evolution of societies.

Intrinsic to the experience of many nations is the pervasive nature of conflict. Military institutions impact societies in areas far beyond the execution of military conflict and in ways not generally understood or documented. Traditionally, the American public regards military conflict as an aberration that is largely confined to a small number of individuals for short periods of time. Every American generation has been engaged in military conflict and/or raised in the shadow of war. The impact of this on national policy, economics, society, social mores, and the individual human being either on the front line or on the home front is just now beginning to be understood. It is vital that an informed public have available to it the full range of records and historical experience necessary to deal with this social reality.

In the spirit of the ICA *Declaration*, an informal group of archivists gathered for a brownbag lunch near the Chicago Vietnam Veterans Memorial during the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting of the Society of American Archivists. These archivists, representing a broad spectrum of military service archives, academic archives, museum archives, and archival educators, met to discuss the need for a formal community within SAA to work toward a synergy in managing both military collections and collections containing military-related materials. It was agreed that leveraging the experience and resources of the much larger spectrum of archives and archivists would foster cooperation and reveal solutions to problems that would benefit the archives community at large. Dedication to this goal was demonstrated by the presentation of a well-attended military archives session during the same meeting. The remarkable response from the SAA community from this initial session led to two more session proposals for the 2012 meeting.

In the past, the care of military and military-related archival collections has largely been decentralized and viewed as a subset of the records of the individual stakeholders with no unified vision for collecting, processing, and providing access to this massive corpus of materials. Moreover, the failure to understand the interrelationships of these various materials has led to misunderstanding in the archives community, academia, and society at large of the pervasiveness of the impact of the nation's military-related experiences. There is a very real need not only to comprehend the pervasiveness of this experience but also to exploit the lessons that can be learned from it to bring greater understanding of the national experience as a whole. This need is not limited to the United States alone. It is a central component to understanding global history as well.

To bring about this greater understanding and to promote an appreciation of the impact of the military and military action in society, it is vital that institutions documenting this experience speak a common language, share information, promote greater access, develop best practices, and leverage digital technologies to process this massive, growing, and increasingly "born digital" mountain of information. The Military Archives Roundtable therefore would seek to accomplish the following objectives:

- a. Describe and communicate the value of military records to the larger archival and historical community.
- b. Advocate for the value of these records to parent institutions.
- c. Develop joint standards for collection, arrangement and description, and the sharing of resources.
- d. Address institutional concerns, such as museums that have archival components.
- e. Create common standards for processing, references services, and information sharing through development of an e-mail discussion list.
- f. Address policy issues with our communities of interest.
- g. Address areas of tension and misunderstanding in our communities of interest, such as the perceived adversarial relationship between the academic and military communities.
- h. Address joint standards on processing of and access to electronic records.
- i. Advocate for uniform collection/retention policies for records generated during ongoing conflicts.
- j. Promote the acquisition and use of records beyond standard operational histories to include areas such as the home front, military families, race and gender issues, and enemy military policy and combatants.
- k. Promote student access to the profession.
- l. Advocate for the development of functional policies governing access to materials.

The Roundtable also has considered potential topics for future sessions at the SAA annual meeting. These include:

1. Digital preservation.
2. Collaborative projects between institutions of various sizes, support bases, and collection focuses.
3. Common descriptive standards for military records.
4. Management issues related to operating collections of various sizes and collection focuses

Promoting acquisition, care, and access to military-related collections represents a vital public trust. Accomplishing these objectives would not only benefit archivists at military institutions but also foster an increased level of cooperation among archival repositories of many disciplines, beyond traditional borders and across international boundaries. The accomplishment of these objectives for the military archives community would be historic, and the benefit of this kind of application of resources to the entire archives community would be incalculable.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the SAA Council approve the petition to form a Military Archives Roundtable with the following Statement of Intent and Goals:**

**Statement of Intent: The purpose of the Military Archives Roundtable is to create a forum for SAA members to facilitate collaboration and information sharing among**

**archival institutions, universities, governments, legal bodies, and nongovernment agencies that are documenting and preserving records of issues related to the military and military service.**

### **Goals**

- **To foster dialogue among archivists working with military related collections and other stakeholders on a wide variety of Archival issues, including management, preservation, description and access to the wide spectrum of materials documenting the impact of military conflict. To facilitate collaboration and information sharing among archival institutions, universities, governments, legal bodies, and non-government agencies that are documenting and preserving records of issues related to the military and military service.**
- **To advocate for the collection and preservation of materials related to all issues emanating from military activities and to push for fair policies for open access to these resources with due consideration to balancing the very definite public need to know with responsible consideration of national security issues.**
- **To foster cooperation and leverage the resources, experiences, and ideas of a wide range of professionals, institutions, and stakeholders to establish policies, best practices, and address management issues and techniques to benefit the archival profession at large.**
- **To facilitate the dissemination of information concerning military holdings in repositories to researchers and other repositories.**
- **To foster cooperation among institutions across this spectrum to specifically devise standardized descriptive nomenclature, access policies and greater access to military collections by the public at large.**

**Support Statement:** The roundtable petition meets all submission requirements for the Council's consideration in approving a new SAA roundtable.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** Creation of a Military Archives Roundtable that represents a broad spectrum of military service archives, academic archives, museum archives, and archival educators is in alignment with all three of SAA's strategic priorities:

1. Educating and training of SAA members to ensure that they are aware of the evolving standards for electronic records.
2. Pursuing the relevance of archives to society and ensuring SAA members and their collections reflect the diversity of society.
3. Advocating an active role in promoting the importance of archives and archivists to protect the accountability of organizations and governments, and the accessibility of historical records.

**Fiscal Impact:** Will require additional meeting room or other space at SAA Annual Meetings going forward.