INFORMATION PAPER

SUBJECT: Army Operational Records, Data Collection, and Readiness

1. Purpose. To provide a brief history of the collection methods, importance, and use of Army operational records across the Army Enterprise.

2. Facts.

    a. The long-term ability of an Army to learn from its experiences, prepare effective doctrine, adequately train and care for its Soldiers, and generate an able and ready force requires that it develop methods and procedures to capture its own operational data. Key elements of that effort include an effective records management and retirement process, a robust training program for the managers of that process, and adequate provisions to make that saved data available to users throughout the force. Such a records management system must also have effective inspection and enforcement measures that ensure that commanders take their responsibilities in this area seriously. Without these four elements no records management system can fully succeed, and the Army will be unable to learn from its past experiences or provide the data needed to care for its forces.

    b. Historically, the United States Army relied upon the office of the Adjutant General to retain essential records and paperwork. That office, created on 16 June 1776, became responsible for the printing and keeping of orders and records, as well as the management of personnel. In order to ensure that other Army units took their record keeping responsibility seriously, the Adjutant General's office worked closed with the Inspector General, Maj. Gen. Friedrich von Steuben, to develop an inspection and enforcement system to standardize the Army's paperwork and administration system.

    c. The Adjutant General's ability to control the flow of information and his access to the secretary of war and the commanding general, as well as to politicians in Washington, D.C., made the position one of the most powerful in the Army during the 19th century. Although assigned a variety of duties, including at one point accounting for issued equipment, recruiting, and intelligence collection, The Adjutant General retained his functions as the Army's senior record keeper, issuer of orders, and personnel administrator into the 20th century. Throughout World War II, the office of the Adjutant General ensured that units maintained daily staff journals and logs, personnel records, war diaries, and operational summaries on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis. Those detailed records were kept scrupulously and retired after the war to the National Archives where they have provided a wealth of operational data for doctrine writers, official historians,

and scholars throughout the world. Despite the 1946 reorganization of Army Service Forces that saw the Adjutant General realigned under the Army G-1, this records and data collection system remained in place throughout the Korean and Vietnam Wars. All continued to be based on numerical file systems that assigned specific designations and disposition instructions to all paper records created by all Army TOE and TDA organizations (using standard manila file folders, labels, and file cabinets maintained by trained file clerks).

d. Reorganizations in 1962 and 1971changed the functions of the Adjutant General's office, but left it with the records management responsibility. However, in 1985 the Adjutant General lost many of its remaining personnel functions to the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center and its records management functions to the newly created Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Information Management and the Information Systems Command. Because both those elements were so heavily focused, both in concepts and resources, on the growing importance of automated data processing and computers, responsibility for keeping and storing administrative and operational records was increasingly neglected. Gradually, the records management process became a garrison function with the installation records manager serving as part of the Directorate of Information Management. In sum, the transfer of the function of records management to the Information Management community led to a prolonged and disastrous decline in Army record-keeping training and policy enforcement and a resulting decrease in the preservation of unit operational data. During the same period, the previously robust system of comprehensive unit inspections by the Office of the Inspector General (IG) gradually weakened and the once annual inspections of the records management program ceased. Without command influence or inspection by an outside entity like the prestigious office of the IG, units in garrison soon realized that they could ignore many of their records management missions without any serious consequences.

e. The first major operational experience after Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, highlighted the virtual collapse of the Army's operational records keeping system. Under the strain of rapid deployment into a new world of joint theater headquarters as mandated by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, Army units found themselves controlled operationally by a joint overseas command that cared little about institutional policies and peacetime structures. Army units in Saudi Arabia maintained only tenuous links back to the institutional Army, an Army that was seen solely as a provider of forces with little to no command authority over deployed forces. Records preservation and management fell by the wayside and few records personnel (many of them DA civilians or non-deployable) went with their units. This, coupled with the increased usage of electronic files that seemed to fall outside the Army Regulations for record-keeping (AR 25-400-2 Modern Army Records Keeping System or MARKS, 1986) led many units to fail to maintain, retain, and retire their records in any complete or systematic way. When reports of the so-called "Gulf War Syndrome" began to surface shortly after the end of active combat, the mystery of its cause prompted

the Congress to direct that the Army investigate. To do so, the Army had to recreate as many of the lost, missing, or destroyed records to the extent possible. As a result of poor or non-existent records retention, many Army units were unable to accurately determine their locations, operations at given times, major incidents, and a host of other details.

f. With the obvious failure of the regular records keeping system, the Army fell back on those few service members who were deployed to Saudi Arabia as individual historians or as members of Military History Detachments (MHDs). MHDs are, with one active duty exception, entirely within the Reserve Components. Units consist of three man teams: an officer, generally a major, an NCO and a specialist. These MHDs, along with a few active duty augmentees, were assigned to combat and support units to conduct oral history interviews, prepare small-scale after action reports and gather copies of key documents that might not otherwise be preserved. Given their small number and limited mandate, these historians understandably managed to save only a fraction of the records generated by Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. They were a key fraction, but no more than a selected portion of those generated that should have been kept and retired by the units. In fact, at the time no one appreciated the degree to which the Army's records management system had deteriorated since the disestablishment of the Office of the Adjutant General. On the whole, some copies of the key records of XVIII Airborne Corps during DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM were collected, palletized, shipped, and organized by the personal intervention of the XVIII Airborne Corps historian deployed with the unit. However, most of the VII Corps records were misplaced for years with only a portion migrating with the soon to be inactivated corps to its headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. Deployed historians even reported that they had come across units actively burning their entire collection of operational records rather than be bothered to haul them back to their home stations.

g. The failure of units to organize and retire their records in a systematic fashion led the Army to adopt a variety of expedients to answer the questions revolving around Gulf War Syndrome inquiries and to put in place some kind of system to prevent such a reoccurrence of records failure in the future. The Center of Military History was tasked in early 1995 to assume the mission of collecting and declassifying Gulf War records and over the next three years accumulated, reviewed, processed, and retired thousands of linear feet of documents. The Center established a Gulf War Declassification Section on 1 April 1995 that grew to encompass the activities of over thirty soldiers, civilians, and contractors by 1996. Section personnel had to plead by mail and in person with units to turn over their records (those that had not been destroyed) for cataloguing and digitization. Teams of officers were sent world-wide to gather document from units that had participated in the Gulf War. They emptied file cabinets, dug in CONEX containers, and explored closets and footlockers to locate, identify, gather, and ship back hundreds of boxes of documents. At the same time, the Center worked with the Combined Arms Center and the Center

for Army Lessons Learned at Fort Leavenworth to obtain their collection of digitized records and place them on a consolidated searchable web site. However, when many of the digitized records turned out to be copies of copies and drafts of memos and not genuine contingency records, the Gulf War Declassification leaders had to turn to personal interviews of senior commanders to try and piece together the operational positions on the ground of certain units at certain times. This task had become critical when it was suspected that Iraqi nerve agents and mustard gas were accidentally blown up along with other captured munitions at the Kamisayah ammunition depot shortly after the cease-fire. The resulting plume of smoke was suspected of containing toxins that might have been the cause of many of the symptoms of Gulf War Illness. Individuals in any of the units nearby could have been affected. However, it proved slow and expensive to reconstruct the simple fact of where units were at any given time on the battlefield. Although the collection, declassification, and digitization mission was far from complete, the project was turned over to Personnel Command (PERSCOM) on1 Jan 1997. On 1 October of that same year the project was merged with a newly formed Army Declassification Activity (ADA) and a year later, on 1 October 1998, all of that was rolled under a newly formed Records Management and Declassification Agency (RMDA) created under a newly reconstituted office of the Adjutant General. However, the continuing attempts to deal with a flood of operational records issues resulting from deployments in the 1990s to Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia highlighted that the records management system remained broken.

h. Attempts by the revived office of The Adjutant General to create new policies and procedures to solve the continuing Army-wide issue of records management led to some new initiatives. Streamlined regulations (AR 25-400-2 Army Records Information Management Systems, 2007) and handbooks (DA Pam 25-403 Guide to Record Keeping in the Army, 2007) were produced and disseminated. However, the policy initiatives, no matter how thoroughly formulated and devised, were continually handicapped by the high operational tempo of U.S. forces, especially after 9/11, and by the continuing lack of large numbers of dedicated and trained records managers down to the unit level. Any attempt to resurrect the old records management system foundered upon these basic shortcomings. While associated with G-1 (Personnel), the basic records management mission, to include the management of operational records, was frequently perceived as only pertaining to personnel records. Consequently, in an attempt to elevate the status of the mission and enhance the importance of retaining and retiring all records and not just personnel records, RMDA itself was officially moved out of the G-1, Human Resources Command on 1 October 2005 and placed under the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army.

i. The increasing operational tempo of Army units after 9/11 pulled the problem of records management off the back burner again and made the collection, retention, and retirement of operational records a critical matter.

Despite the regulatory and legal requirements for units to keep their records (36 CFR, Chapter XII, Parts 1200-1299 and 44 USC 3301-3314) and the continuing requirements of units to keep records of their history and document the death and injury of soldiers, operational records retention and retirement in units fell far behind the policy goals. The increasing use of electronic records—easy to create and move but also difficult to organize and easy to erase—made the situation more complicated as the varied classification of such records and the absence of any joint doctrine pertaining to records management. Again, extraordinary measures by the Army and joint history programs have led to the deployment of historians and Military History Detachments to Afghanistan and Iraq in an attempt to capture some small measure of the flood of electronic records. Much of the success of this effort relied upon the individual training and persuasiveness of the historians in question and the receptiveness of the command to their efforts. For example, in 2004 MHDs were banned from Afghanistan by the theater commander, and they did not return until 2007. In the intervening period, very few Operation ENDURING FREEDOM records were saved anywhere, either for historian's use or for the services documentary needs for unit heritage or for the increasing challenge with documenting Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

j. The main data collection efforts for the early campaigns in Afghanistan were, given the "shoestring" nature of the initial attacks, even more ad hoc than usual. Individual historians and one MHD were mobilized and sent to theater with the various special operations task forces and forward headquarters of the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC). The highly classified nature of much of the early operations—often performed in conjunction with elements of other governmental agencies—precluded retirement of most of the operational records to any location outside the controlling U.S. Special Operations command and U.S. Army Special Operations Command headquarters. Nonetheless, enough was saved to write the initial historical accounts of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) with some measure of fidelity. After the creation of a more "regular" headquarters structure in Afghanistan, lack of command interest and continued failure to provide for a systematic records collection and retirement system (compounded by the joint and combined nature of the theater) led to a virtual vacuum of operational records from 2004-2007. Only sporadic efforts have followed since.

k. The early operations in Iraq (Operation IRAQI FREEDOM or OIF) were likewise reasonably well covered by deployed historians, deployed MHDs, and special Army collection teams, including the special project team from Fort Leavenworth's Combined Arms Command that was to write *On Point*. That volume covered the period from planning the operation in late 2002 until approximately May 2003. The project then disbanded and retired its collected copies of records to the Center for Army Lessons Learned. However, only extraordinary, and ongoing, efforts by the continual rotation of historians from the Army history community and the coordination efforts of the Joint History Office in

the Pentagon have saved even some small percentage of operational records. In addition, as an aid to this process, CMH, sometimes in conjunction with RMDA but more often on its own, has sent out small teams of one or two individuals—military reservists and civilians—to visit units recently returned from theaters in order to convince them to make copies of hard-drives and other files available to our collectors. This effort has filled in some important holes, especially from the often ignored National Guard units and those not visited by deployed historians. However, since the DOD November 2008 prohibition on the use of USB ports to attach removable hard-drives and other storage devices directly to unit hard drives to download operational records, all of these efforts have halted. Currently no records are being collected from either deployed units or those that have returned to their home stations and the organization of those records that have been collected has been severely curtailed because of this.

l. As just one example of the continuing need for current operational records and the lack of a comprehensive system to retrieve (and provide for the use of) operational records, one has to look no further than the special efforts of the office of the Army G-8 in January 2006. At that time, the G-8 office that worked on the Quadrennial Defense Review faced the need for current operational data to support its studies. Without a regular system in place that captured operational records and without any means to access effectively what few records were captured, the Deputy Chief of Staff G-8, LTG David Melcher, created a one year contract (costing approximately, $500K) with Rand Arroyo Center to gather operational data. The project was justified on the grounds that it was needed to "assist the Army in collecting as much data as possible to serve as the basis for current and future analyses of Army and joint issues, for planning, and for training for the future joint and multinational operations." Ironically, the first stop for the data collectors under this contract was not the units, but the Center of Military History where they proceeded to download hundreds of gigabytes of electronic copies of the historical data laboriously collected in theater, unit by unit, by deployed historians. The Rand team also visited RMDA to identify and collect some of the operational records that they had managed to retrieve from deployed units. This was money that was, in essence, wasted to duplicate what should have already been in place: a records management system.

m. Another initiative to collect data that sought, at some cost, to make up for the continuing shortfalls of a functioning records keeping system occurred at Fort Lewis, WA beginning in 2007. At Fort Lewis the recognized need to capture operational data on deployed Stryker Brigade regarding equipment readiness rates and operational lessons learned and for training and doctrine needs, prompted the command to establish a "data mining" contract with SAIC. Under the terms of the contract, SAIC data collectors remotely search through the web sites and SIPR net accounts of deployed Stryker units looking for insights, observations, documents, after action reports, roadside bomb reports, equipment maintenance records and other forms of operational data that otherwise might

vanish. Seeking to capitalize on this initiative, and lacking other systematic means to ensure that the records are kept, the Center of Military History has provided additional funds to expand the team of contractors and capture more operational data for more units. Although the initiative does not guarantee that all relevant records will be collected, it represents one more attempt to backstop a failed records management system.

n. Given the continual problem with units retaining and retiring operational records, it should come as no surprise that the Army and DoD have generated numerous policy letters, instructions, messages, and memos to organizations and units reemphasizing the importance of such records, many signed by the Secretary of the Army and the Deputy Secretary of Defense . Such memoranda and messages serve a useful purpose of highlighting the importance of operational records but the continual need to remind deployed units of this fact only serves to drive home the fact that it continues to be a problem. Commanders of deployed units continue to remark to historians and others who ask about records retention policy and rate of conformance to the regulations that they lack the expertise, time, and manpower to comply with what to them is an administrative burden. Until Army policy and procedures for operational records retention and retirement are made part of a comprehensive, effective program, one that includes adequate training and inspection components, the service will continue to throw away its operational data, its heritage, and its history.

o. The issue of operational records management has been noted by scholars outside the Army and DOD. The Department of the Army Historical Advisory Committee (DAHAC), a formal advisory committee to the Secretary of the Army consisting of academics and service historians first created in 1947, has consistently attempted to raise this issue and highlight the importance of a comprehensive records program. In 2005 the DAHAC Report stated: "The DAHAC recommends that the Army leadership direct their attention to the preservation of official records, with an emphasis on the electronic aspect of the problem, and take steps to improve awareness of the importance of this task throughout the Army." The following year the DAHAC reported: "Comprehensive data collection is essential to the writing of sound military history, which has potentially large effects on future planning and education" and "up to now, the records issue has not been addressed in a manner commensurate with its serious nature, and strongly urges the Army to do so." Finally, in the most recent DAHAC report on its way to the Secretary of the Army, Professor Reina Pennington, the DAHAC chairperson, while approving the ad hoc use of historians to collect some operational records, goes on to note: "Records management is our top concern. The DAHAC worries that the Army has not devoted sufficient priority and resources to proper records collection and retirement. *History based on the vital information in these records can save lives and dollars* [her emphasis]. Units are losing their own history." Historians, educators, and scholars in and outside of the Army are deeply distressed at the continuing loss of this vital resource and have continually raised the problem with

the Army leadership. But the real loss is not to the scholarly community of military historians, but to the Army itself in terms of the lessons learned and data lost to its trainers, instructors, and doctrine writers and to those charged with fully documenting the health and medical conditions of its Solders.

3. Conclusions:

a. The systematic and comprehensive collection of operational records serves a variety of purposes for the Army and the nation: lessons learned, doctrinal changes, equipment validation, unit heritage, operational readiness rates, unit history, legal documentation, medical data, and personnel statistics. The collection of records is a matter of public law and long standing Army regulation. It is required by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and there are legal penalties involved with not saving the appropriate documentation and being able to retrieve and provide that information to public inquirers. Without a system to collect and retain all relevant official records in a systematic manner, any body of evidence or documentation will be incomplete, anecdotal, and thus only partially trustworthy. The lack of such data is costly to the soldier (with his potential legal and medical issues), to the commander (who needs to know what his unit has done, when and where it has done it), the Army (with its doctrine writers, materiel and logistics analysts, planners, and trainers), and to the nation which deserves an accurate accounting of the actions of its military. Its lack affects unit readiness, morale, and training in the long run and thus impacts unit effectiveness. When it is necessary—as it almost always is—to reconstruct those records due to legal, medical, or Congressional mandates, it is tremendously expensive and time consuming task and one that is almost never fully successful due to the many records that are irretrievably lost.

b. The function and value of records management, like that of history itself, can be found across the Army Enterprise. It is the necessary enabler for training the force since without records and the analysis of those records, it is impossible to create solid doctrine that should be at the base of all training. It is the necessary evidence for lessons learned that create and sustain an adaptable and nimble Army. It enriches intelligence collection with long-range perspective and documents the success or failure of materiel parts and systems over time. It takes care of the long-term needs of soldiers who might need medical help or documentation for Veterans' Administration care. The care, retention, retirement and development of record retrieval and analysis systems provide the evidentiary basis for all aspects of how the Army performs its mission in garrison or on operations. It is an essential part of the materiel, readiness, services and infrastructure, and personnel functions of the Army Enterprise. It cannot be optional for a modern, innovative Army but must be incorporated into the daily operations of the force with suitably trained soldiers and civilians, in sufficient numbers, in the right space, in the right organization, with regular inspection to ensure compliance, to accomplish the function thoroughly. To do any less

cheats the Army of the ability to learn from its own experiences and generate the trained and ready forces needed by the nation.

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