Documenting the American Experience in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

Society of American Archivists
2012 Research Forum
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Eliot Wilczek Simmons College & Tufts University
2011 SAA Research Forum

1. What are the unique documentary challenges of these wars?
2. What archival institutions and capacities are needed to document these wars?
3. Could archives apply lessons from documenting these wars to other work?
Introduction

Small Wars

Big Data

War by Other Hard-to-Document Means

Social Media

Societal Isolation

Conclusion

Scope

Documenting American military communities’ experience in Iraq & Afghanistan Wars.
2012 SAA Research Forum

**Scope**
Documenting American military communities’ experience in Iraq & Afghanistan Wars.

**Documentary Challenges**
1. Small Wars
2. Big Data
3. War by Other Hard-to-Document Means
4. Social Media
5. Societal Isolation
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Documentary Challenges
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Research Goal
Agenda setting
Small Wars
Nature of Counterinsurgency Warfare

**Definition**
DoD “Comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.”

Ambiguous
Difficult to measure
Population-centric
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Small Unit Center of Gravity

Operations

Iraq Surge

Corps
Division
Brigade
Battalion
Company
Platoon
Small Unit Center of Gravity

Operational Reporting & Military History Doctrine

- Corps
- Division
- Brigade
- Battalion
- Company
- Platoon

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Questions & Approaches

Question

How to document small-unit warfare with large-unit documentation infrastructure?
Questions & Approaches

**Question**
How to document small-unit warfare with large-unit documentation infrastructure?

**Approaches**
Contextually-driven reporting & locally-based analysis within chain of command
Macroappraisal & functional analysis
Questions & Approaches

**Question**
How to appraise small actions in a geo-political context?
Big Data
Nature of the US Military’s Big Data

**Characteristics**

Intensive data gathering at all levels of command

Wide range of formats

Data gathering outpaces analysis
### Nature of the US Military’s Big Data

#### Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joint headquarters US Forces-Iraq</td>
<td>46 TB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-60 million documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmanned Aerial Vehicles</td>
<td>65 simultaneous image collecting points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24/7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions & Approaches

**Question**
How to meaningfully document military experience out of this mass of data?

How to attach meaningful context to this mass of data?

How to preserve this mass of data?
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How to meaningfully document military experience out of this mass of data?

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**Approaches**
Highly structured organization
Strong warrants for records creation
Context-free grammars | Bill Underwood
Digital curation
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Nature of These Other Means

**Contractors**

March 2011

- Afghanistan & Iraq
  - 155,000 contractors
  - vs.
  - 145,000 uniformed personnel
Nature of These Other Means

Contracts
March 2011
Afghanistan & Iraq
155,000 contractors vs. 145,000 uniformed personnel

Covert Operations
### Nature of These Other Means

#### Contractors

- **March 2011**
  - **Afghanistan & Iraq**
  - **155,000 contractors** vs. **145,000 uniformed personnel**

#### Covert Operations

#### Counterinsurgency Approaches

| Large Footprint | Foreign Internal Defense |
Questions & Approaches

Questions

How to approach non-government records that document government policy?

How to document covert actions?
Questions & Approaches

**Questions**
How to approach non-government records that document government policy?

How to document covert actions?

**Approaches**
Classification reform

FOIA requests | National Security Archive

WikiLeaks
Social Media
Nature of Social Media in the Military

Connecting through Conversations
Blogs
Platoon Leader
Company Command
TIGRNET

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Concerns
OPSEC
Questions & Approaches

Questions
What is the relationship between the military communities and the archives?

Who should capture these unofficial records?
Questions & Approaches

Questions

What is the relationship between the military communities and the archives?

Who should capture these unofficial records?

Approaches

Community archives

Shared authority, multiple creators/multiverse

Personal Information Management
Societal Isolation
Nature of Societal Isolation

**Civilian-Military Gap**

- Men and women served since 2001: \(~4,000,000\)
- Percentage of US population deployed on active duty since 2001: 0.5%
- Service members surveyed believe that the American public has little or no understanding of the problems that military families face: 84%
Nature of Societal Isolation

Percent of total US population in armed services & Number of Americans who served on active duty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World War One</td>
<td>2.75%</td>
<td>4.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War Two</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>16.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean War</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
<td>5.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam War</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>8.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf War</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post–9/11 Wars</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>~4.0 million</td>
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Questions & Approaches

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Final Thoughts

Iraq & Afghanistan Wars present new appraisal challenges
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Deal with increasingly complex traces of evidence and access to mounting volume of data
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Revisiting existing frameworks to meet demands of documentation that falls between the lines of unofficial & official
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Changing information flow is moving outside of official institutional function—how to document?
Photographs

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