

JESSE STEIWER DOUGLAS

1909-1965

Members of the Society of American Archivists whose professional associations go back to the formative years of the National Archives will remember among the bright stars of that era a young historian-archivist, Jesse S. Douglas, who came out of Oregon via the University of Minnesota graduate school, the National Park Service, and the WPA Survey of Federal Archives to join the National Archives staff in 1936 as a reference specialist in the history of the Northwest and in American military history. Douglas was active in our Society and in the American Military Institute, serving as managing editor of the latter's quarterly journal, *Military Affairs*, from 1939 to 1942. The credo of the institute and its journal was intellectual preparedness—"let history [and the records] arm the mind." Harvey A. DeWeerd and Douglas editorialized repeatedly on the theme that the total science of war was an integral field of study coordinate with the sum total of all recognized academic disciplines. Their scholarship and competence as editors were reflected in the journal. In 1941 Douglas wrote in *Military Affairs* (5:129): ". . . any piece of work, be it the delivery of a sermon or the writing of history or the building of a house, must be judged solely by its quality. It does not matter who spoke or wrote or built, but it does matter whether or not the result measures up to a reasonable standard of workmanship." He held himself to this standard throughout a career too soon terminated when he died on Sunday, September 26, 1965, after a long intermittent illness.

Jesse S. Douglas had been commissioned an Army reserve officer in 1931 on graduation from the University of Oregon, where he was a member of Kappa Sigma, Phi Beta Kappa, and Scabbard and Blade. He was called to active duty by the Army in 1942 as a captain in the Adjutant General's Corps. Most appropriately, his first assignment was in the Office of the Director of Records, where he concentrated on disposal of a vast accumulation of routine Army records in the War Department and in the Army's field establishment. In 1943 he was transferred in the rank of major to the General Staff to assist in organizing the Historical Branch of the Intelligence Division and in launching the largest and most comprehensive wartime historical program ever undertaken. The Historical Branch later became the Office of the Chief of Military History, a permanent part of the Army General Staff organization. By the end of the war Douglas had advanced to colonel, and for his wartime services he was awarded the Legion of Merit. In the immediate postwar years he joined the newly established Historical Division in the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He resigned his commission in 1947 to take over a family business in Portland, Oreg. This undertaking was a brief interlude; by 1949 Douglas had returned to Government service, and until he was retired on disability in 1964 he had a variety of intelligence service assignments in Washington, Berlin, and Paris.

Although it was unfortunate for our profession that we lost Jess Douglas to the Army, during the years when he was engaged in work of paramount and

immediate importance to the Nation he never wavered in his love of records and of history. Few men have compressed in so short a span such variety in their careers and performed in each with such integrity and skill. I believe that his first love, professionally, was historical editing. He had discussed with me and with Oliver Holmes of the National Historical Publications Commission his intention, after regaining his health, to resume work on several unfinished documentary publication projects, notably a volume containing Army Inspectors General reports of the 1850's. Even his avocations indicated breadth of interest. He was a member not only of various historical societies but also of the Westerners Club, the Saint Andrew's Society of Washington, the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, and the Caledonian Society of France.

He was buried in Arlington with the full military honors he so well earned. The Very Reverend Francis B. Sayre, Jr., Dean of the Washington Cathedral, officiated. After the rifle volley, after taps, and as the flag from his casket was folded, a lone piper played a Scottish lament. Simultaneously in Salem there was a memorial service attended by his father, E. Frank Douglas, other members of the family, and a good company of friends, including David C. Duniway, Archivist of Oregon.

Jess is survived in Washington by his wife, Florence King Douglas, a daughter, Barbara Rusk, a grandson, Douglas James Rusk, and a son, Jesse King Douglas, a junior at The American University.

For a' that, an' a' that,
 Their dignities an' a' that,
 The pith o' sense, an' pride o' worth,
 Are higher rank than a' that.

SHERROD EAST
National Archives

Credo

I am not to attempt here an exposition of the value of archives, but if I were asked to define the creed of the archivist in four words I should say "the sanctity of evidence." It is not, primarily at any rate, his business to use or interpret his charges; he need not be interested in their contents—indeed it is in some ways an advantage if he is not, for that detachment preserves him from the temptation to *ex parte* procedure. His training, methods, and rules of conduct are in fact, or should be, such that he can at a pinch make shift to perform his functions faithfully without even understanding the meaning of the documents entrusted to him. His part is simply to conserve intact every scrap of evidence which not only the contents of the documents but their form, makeup, provenance, and position in relation to other documents have to offer. His aim is to provide, without prejudice or after-thought, for all who honestly wish to know, the means of knowledge. Viewed in these aspects the good archivist is the most selfless devotee of truth the modern world produces.

—HILARY JENKINSON, "British Archives and the War," in *American Archivist*, 7:16-17 (Jan. 1944).

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