

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIELD RECORDS PROGRAM OF THE NAVY DEPARTMENT

SINCE the Office of Records Administration was established in the Administrative Office of the Navy Department in October, 1941, it has had Navy-wide responsibility for noncurrent records, but, because of the size of the task and the limited personnel available, it has placed primary emphasis on noncurrent records in the Navy Department in Washington. Through March 31, 1944, the Office of Records Administration had caused the transfer of 33,000 cubic feet of records to the National Archives, disposed of with Congressional authorization of at least 100,000 cubic feet of useless records,<sup>1</sup> and transferred to naval records depositories 87,000 cubic feet of records either too active to be transferred to the National Archives or too recent in date to permit their immediate disposal.

As a result of these operations, all permanently valuable records of the Navy Department through 1940, with the exception of certain personnel records and a few relatively small groups of other records, are in the National Archives, and all the rest of the departmental records through that date have been disposed of, leaving the files of the department in what the Navy would call "strip ship" condition. To take care of the records still in the department and those to be created in the future, the office has concentrated on developing schedules for the orderly retirement of departmental records under the authority of Public Law 115 of the Seventy-eighth Congress. Such schedules have been approved by Congress for seven of the eleven major bureaus and offices of the department, and work on schedules for three of the four remaining bureaus is far advanced.

With the noncurrent records of the department proper thus under control, the Office of Records Administration has since January 1, 1944, placed emphasis increasingly on a records retirement program for the shore establishment and the fleet. Some work had been done previously with field records, but this had been limited largely to transmitting disposal lists to Congress, preparing disposal schedules for the records of several types of field offices closely related to bureaus and offices in Washington, and receiving in naval records

<sup>1</sup> The total quantity of records destroyed is considerably larger than the figure given, which includes only those officially reported; many more records have been disposed of in accordance with law, but because no reports are required the quantities are not readily ascertainable.

depositories records shipped in by a few decommissioned or overcrowded "activities," a comprehensive term used by the Navy to include offices and ships of all sizes. Otherwise the field records of the Navy, estimated to occupy 800,000 square feet of space, were virgin territory.

It was decided to approach the field records problem in three ways: (1) by eliminating all records possible *in situ* through the visits of trained personnel to points where Navy records are concentrated; (2) by transferring records not susceptible of immediate disposal to naval records depositories where they can be processed to separate the valuable from the worthless; and (3) by developing broad cross-sectional schedules for the shore establishment and the fleet for the retirement of current and future records. All three approaches are now used simultaneously, but the first to be developed chronologically was that of transferring records to depositories for processing.

Naval Records Depository No. 1 was established in February, 1942. Designed primarily to serve the Navy Department, it is located in Washington in a three-floor building formerly used as an automobile salesroom and garage and has a capacity of 20,000 square feet. Since its establishment, this depository has received records occupying 45,000 square feet of space, mostly in the District of Columbia, and by processing has eliminated 25,000 square feet of them, a turnover of 125 per cent in two years. This processing involves performing as many of the following steps as necessary: (a) Inventory and arrangement; (b) Elimination of duplicate records; (c) Provision of reference service; (d) Determination in co-operation with cognizant offices of the fate of each record group; and (e) Prompt disposal of each record group in accordance with the determination in (d).

The advantages of processing are apparent from the fact that the first records so treated by Depository No. 1, dating from 1918 to 1938, had occupied some 20,000 square feet in a storage building. After processing, only 200 square feet of records or 1 per cent were retained by the Navy. For want of processing earlier, 99 per cent of the records had been retained from four to twenty-four years longer than necessary. In the fiscal year 1943, the depository received records releasing 25,000 square feet of office space and 3,300 filing cabinets, together valued at \$150,000. The cost of operating the depository in 1943 was approximately \$25,000.

Naval Records Depository No. 2, with 50,000 square feet of space, was established at Philadelphia in December, 1943, in an eight-floor structure previously used as an office building and earlier as an automobile salesroom and garage. At the outset, the principal function of this depository was to house permanent records of separated civilian and military personnel too active to be kept in the National Archives. In the first three months of its operation, this depository released 30,150 square feet of space in Washington—18,900 square feet in Navy buildings and the other 11,250 square feet in the National Archives—by the removal of personnel records. An additional 3,000 square feet of space are being released by the transfer of records of men mustered out since Pearl Harbor, and other transfers will be made regularly as men leave the service. Field personnel records, which partially duplicate Washington personnel records and exceed them in bulk, are also being sent to Philadelphia. Approximately 3,000 square feet of records of separated civilian and military personnel have been transferred from the Boston Navy Yard, and similar records from other shore activities will be accepted as rapidly as possible.

Processing personnel records presents many peculiar problems, most of which have yet to be studied and all of which have yet to be solved. Foremost among these is duplication of files, either in whole or in part. A typical individual in the field will have a personnel file in Washington, one in his naval district, one in the activity at which he is stationed, and often one or more in subordinate units of this activity. If the individual moves from one activity or district to another, the number of separate files increases accordingly. A high degree of duplication exists among these files, but no simple formula has been found for eliminating this duplication and effecting a compact, unique file. Even within an individual's file at a single activity there is often duplication of certain types of documents which should be eliminated by weeding. Finally, after a file is closed and has been weeded and placed in definitive form, whether it should be retained permanently in that form or destroyed after microfilming is worthy of serious consideration. The coming months should witness the solution of some of these problems and a corresponding reduction in the bulk of inactive personnel records stored at Philadelphia.

Although it was established primarily for personnel records, the Philadelphia depository soon found that it was called upon to accept records of three other major types, namely, noncurrent records of

permanent shore activities, records of decommissioned activities, and ship files. Arrangements were therefore made to use the small amount of remaining space available in the building for receiving and processing records of these types sent in from various naval activities along the Atlantic Coast. The response of naval activities was immediate and impressive. In a few weeks the depository received ship files occupying 5,240 square feet of space from the New York Navy Yard, the Boston Navy Yard, the New London Submarine Base, and the Key West Naval Operating Base. It also received inactive records occupying 5,520 square feet from the Philadelphia Navy Yard and thereby released 980 filing cabinets. The value of the space and equipment released was \$37,231. These savings will increase as the records are processed and disposed of.

On the basis of the accomplishments of Naval Records Depositories Nos. 1 and 2, and in view of the vast quantities of records known to exist at naval activities, the establishment of three additional depositories for the processing of records was authorized. In lieu of one of these depositories, a former garage building containing 30,000 square feet of space was obtained in Philadelphia to serve as an annex to Depository No. 2. Naval Records Depository No. 3, a small structure in the Middle West, was built for the security storage of microfilm copies of vital naval documents. Since the film stored there is from Washington rather than the field, this depository will not be discussed further here. For Depository No. 4, space was found in a thirteen-floor parking garage in Los Angeles. Five floors containing a total of 60,000 square feet of space were obtained initially, with provision for the acquisition of additional floors as needed. Both Depository No. 4 and the annex to Depository No. 2 began operations on July 1, 1944. The site for Depository No. 5 and the time of its establishment have yet to be determined.

Although the naval records depositories deal exclusively with non-current records, the records are far from inactive. Depository No. 1, serving the department in Washington, receives 6,500 service requests a year, or 30 per working day. At Philadelphia, where the personnel files are exceedingly active, the requests are received at the rate of 83,000 a year, or 265 a day. This heavy reference service work, coupled with the extensive processing already mentioned, obviously removes the depositories far from the category of warehouses for the dead storage of old files.

One final word should be said about the naval records depositories.

Their personnel is selected with considerable care, since the normal complement for each consists of only nine persons, namely, an officer in charge, an assistant officer in charge, a stenographer, two file clerks, one of whom is usually an enlisted man, a truck driver, and three laborers. A larger staff is required, of course, to service the personnel files in Philadelphia. Thus far the professional personnel for the depositories includes Lt. (jg) Everett O. Alldredge, who, under the director of records administration, is officer in charge of all naval records depositories as well as officer in charge of Naval Records Depository No. 2 in Philadelphia; Lt. Paul L. Bishop, who until recently has been serving on loan as records officer for the Bureau of Yards and Docks; Lt. (jg) Lewis Darter, who has recently been commissioned in the United States Naval Reserve; Chief Specialist Herbert Randall, officer in charge of Naval Records Depository No. 1 in Washington; and Yeoman, Second Class, Albert Whimpey, assigned to the depository in Washington, and Gordon Williams, assigned to the depository at Philadelphia. Like Lt. Comdr. Emmett J. Leahy, director of records administration, and other key members of his staff concerned with noncurrent records, all these men before joining the United States Naval Reserve were members of the staff of the National Archives.

The second phase of the Navy's program for field records consists of an intensive program for the speedy elimination of large backlogs of noncurrent records which have accumulated over the years at the major naval establishments throughout the country. The retirement of these records is effected by members of the staff of the Office of Records Administration sent out from Washington, usually in teams of two. Although these teams are concerned primarily with noncurrent records, they are qualified as a rule to advise on current records and microphotographic problems, which are often closely related to the retirement of noncurrent records. In the two weeks that are normally required at each major naval activity, the teams check to see that records already authorized by Congress for disposal have been eliminated, and if they have not, disposal is effected; they prepare disposal lists for Congressional approval for obsolete records not previously authorized for disposal; they draw up disposal schedules to cover present and future accumulations of records; they arrange for the transfer of records to naval records depositories when the records are in need of processing before dis-

posal or when they are no longer needed at the activity but must be preserved for a fixed period of time; and they perform a multitude of other chores and services needed to make the activity's files shipshape. These teams have been highly effective in providing immediate relief to crowded naval activities. They have also stirred up considerable business for the depositories. For example, nearly all the records transferred to the Philadelphia depository thus far, exclusive of personnel records, have been sent in by teams operating in navy yards and other naval activities at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, and Charleston. Immediately after the opening of Depository No. 4 on the West Coast, teams will be dispatched to Pearl Harbor, Puget Sound, Mare Island, Los Angeles, San Diego, and other nearby points to eliminate backlogs at those points. By the end of July it is expected that most of this West Coast backlog will be assembled for processing in the Los Angeles depository.

In the course of "blitzing" these backlogs of record, and also as a part of the processing of records sent to the depositories, additional schedules will be developed for the retirement of records of the naval shore establishment and the fleet as the third phase of the Navy's field records program. Since naval activities number in the thousands and types of naval activities may be counted by the hundreds, it has been determined to work out schedules for types of activities, beginning with those that are largest or most numerous. Schedules have already been approved by Congress for supply, accounting, and disbursing offices, which probably cover in bulk at least half the field records of the Navy. Other schedules are pending in Congress or the National Archives for records of inspectors of naval material, labor boards, and disbanded activities of the Marine Corps in noncombat zones, and a comprehensive schedule for all vessels of the United States fleet is in preparation. Schedules less broad in scope have been prepared or authorized for bulky individual items or files, such as general correspondence in ship files and navy yard files on ship repair and maintenance, pending the completion of more comprehensive schedules. A few schedules for specific large or important activities have also been prepared, among them the Naval Air Material Center, the Philadelphia Navy Yard, the Marine Corps Depot of Supplies, and the United States Naval Academy. The war will be over before schedules are completed for all naval activities, or at least so it is hoped, but if the expected progress is

made in scheduling the records of large and numerous activities, only the smaller activities will remain untouched when demobilization begins.

The field records program of the Navy, despite the progress already made, is still in a fluid, developmental stage. At present, however, it seems as if it will center increasingly around the naval records depositories. Besides processing the old records of the permanent shore establishment and such specialized types of records as the personnel files, the depositories are processing ship files that have been put ashore and records of decommissioned activities. It may be that in time all records of decommissioned activities not immediately disposable under a schedule will be sent automatically to a depository for processing. The functions of the depositories may expand in still another direction. It may be that they can eventually perform for the areas in which they are located all the services now rendered to the Navy Department in Washington by the Office of Records Administration—correspondence management, current records management, noncurrent records management, administrative reference service and the controlled issuance of directives, and microphotographic service. If that should happen, the depositories will become regional offices of records administration for the Navy, merely guided and coordinated by the headquarters office in Washington.

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