



A TOO TYPICAL COUNTY VAULT

# Retirement of Federal War Records<sup>1</sup>

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*War Records Office, The National Archives*

THE Army Service Forces have a slogan that for sheer brashness nothing can surpass: "The impossible we do at once; the miraculous takes a little longer." The National Archives, which has recently passed its tenth year of existence, does not lay claim to either such self-confidence or such demonstrated miracles of achievement. Nevertheless it does feel a quiet pride for its significant part in meeting the challenge posed on the war records front. That challenge was and still is formidable. It can be said to be completely met only when all responsible officials and researchers have ready access to all valuable records bearing upon any phase of the war-making process.

Let us not forget that after World War I we lost the peace. It cannot be overemphasized that at this juncture of history America is in danger of losing not only the peace but the war. It cannot be sufficiently reiterated to the American people that we are not now at peace. We are in a curious and complex situation unprecedented in our history. Nothing can more forcefully illustrate this point than the recent action of the lower house of Congress when it voted unanimously, 374 votes to none, to maintain a 6,000-ship Navy in active and reserve categories.

In such circumstances it would be folly to neglect the prompt and effective safeguarding of our vital war records. And by safeguarding we mean all the processes that enter into it: (1) Workmanlike surveys, (2) appraisal for disposal and retention, (3) safe housing, (4) classification, arrangement, and description, and (5) servicing. The fifth point is the target objective. All else that we do can be justified only when we have control over the records retained and we can furnish ready and effective service.

Now let us consider briefly where we were before the war period, what has happened since, what we have done about it, where we are now, and what may be forecast for the future.

From 1935 through 1938 the National Archives was engaged in the survey of Federal records in the National Capital. This survey disclosed

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read by the writer, a member of the staff of the War Records Office of the National Archives and an Army reserve officer, before the ninth annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Indianapolis, November 7, 1945.

the existence of more than 3,000,000 cubic feet of records. During most of the same period the Survey of Federal Archives of the Works Progress Administration, with the cooperation of the National Archives, surveyed Federal records throughout the rest of the United States. This work disclosed the existence of about 4,000,000 cubic feet of field records. If we add to these the records of the many post offices that were not included in the surveys and those, perhaps, of some marginal groups, we may hazard an estimate of 8,000,000 cubic feet of United States Government records in 1938. The probable accumulations between the years 1938 and 1941, which included a 15-month period of partial mobilization, further increased the volume so that at the time of the Pearl Harbor disaster the Federal Government staggered under a burden of some 12,000,000 to 14,000,000 cubic feet of records.

Since the National Archives and the Survey of Federal Archives completed their original comprehensive surveys, prior to 1938, no further all-inclusive surveys have been possible. Nevertheless we have been able to estimate from the fairly accurate investigations made by the agencies of the armed forces and certain of the temporary and permanent agencies of the Government that the amount of Federal records has increased about 50 percent since Pearl Harbor.

In the years between the establishment of the National Archives and the entry of this country into the war, about one-third of a million cubic feet of records were transferred to the National Archives. Another third of a million cubic feet were received during the war years. Obviously, under the circumstances, the arrangement, description, and inventorying of this great volume of records have fallen far behind that necessary for optimum use. The National Archives has been severely handicapped in providing service on records of emergency agencies of the first World War, because the files of those agencies were neither properly segregated for retention and disposal, nor were they properly retired—unless one can call a paper dump a method of retirement. Wartime reductions in the staff of the National Archives also seriously hampered the provision of information from other records in the custody of the Archivist. Although the scholar is usually not too pressed for time, the administrator desiring to know what Joe Doakes did to solve a situation similar to the one with which he is faced and John Q. Public anxious to make good a claim are both zealots for getting answers quickly. But sadly enough, because of the many demands that are made on the National Archives, people are sometimes kept waiting or are even turned away.

One is reminded of a story told a few years ago by a gentleman on a State Industrial Commission. One day the Commission received a letter from a widow who was entitled to an award because of the death

of her husband. "I am," wrote the widow, "having so much trouble in trying to collect the money that I sometimes almost wish I had my husband back."

The miracle is that, despite the adversities referred to, so much useful reference service has been and is being rendered. Somehow many of the emergency war agencies were supplied with needed data, and many an honest claimant was helped to equity. In the files of the Archivist of the United States are many letters from both public and private sources expressing appreciation of extraordinary services.

Our immature and chaotic records inheritance from the first World War has often been referred to in the past and I shall not further labor the point here. We all decided to do better by the products of World War II. By "we" I refer mainly to the Executive Office of the President, the National Archives, and the old-line war agencies, the War and Navy Departments. All of these agencies commenced a simultaneous attack on the problem.

The first official shot was fired by President Roosevelt in a letter written to Harold D. Smith, Director of the Bureau of the Budget. "I am very much interested," wrote the President in the spring of 1942, "in the steps that you have been taking to keep a current record of war administration. I suggest that you carry this program further." President Roosevelt then went on to urge that "an accurate and objective account of our present experience" be preserved, and he furthermore directed that "officials in war agencies will bear in mind the importance of systematic records, and to the extent commensurate with their heavy duties, cooperate in this undertaking."<sup>2</sup>

A Committee on Records of War Administration was established, of which Waldo G. Leland, Director of the American Council of Learned Societies, was chairman, Pendleton Herring of Harvard University was secretary, and the Archivist of the United States, Solon J. Buck, the Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish, and others were members. This Committee was primarily a policy-forming body without operational functions. To carry on the work of the Committee, Budget Director Smith established a War Records Section in the Division of Administrative Management of the Bureau of the Budget. This Section has been concerned chiefly with encouraging the establishment of war history units in other Federal agencies, and with supplementing the normal documentation of war activities at high levels.

Prior to these developments, the Archivist of the United States and his staff had been stressing the importance of sound records administration, of which records retention is an important part. The principle

<sup>2</sup> *American Archivist*, 5: 200 (July 1942).



had to be brought to the attention of the officials of more than one hundred agencies, and many did not hear the call or refused to lend an ear. The interest of the President, the Committee on Records of War Administration, and the Bureau of the Budget in the creation of adequate records of the war, however, lent encouragement to the broader records administration program of the National Archives.

Borrowing military parlance, we may say that the records offensive proceeded with simultaneous attacks in three recognizable theaters of operations: (1) The old-line peace agencies, such as the State, Treasury, Justice, and Commerce Departments; (2) the old-line military agencies, notably the War and Navy Departments; and (3) the emergency war agencies, of which there are several score, including such well-known ones as the War Production Board, the Office of Price Administration, the Selective Service System, and the War Manpower Commission.

### *The Old-Line Peace Agencies*

Some of the old-line peace agencies, interestingly enough, have very important and sometimes extensive war functions to perform and consequently create war-related records. Among them the Department of Agriculture is considerably advanced in its records management program and facilities. The Production and Marketing Administration, which comprises about 60 percent of the activities of the Department, is especially active in this program. On all disposal and transfer jobs liaison with the National Archives is maintained through the Chief of the Communications Division, Office of Plant and Operations. This Division has separate units for current and noncurrent records, through which it attempts to standardize records management work throughout the agency. In 1944 the Department of Agriculture had some 600,000 cubic feet of records, half in Washington and half in the field, but the proportion of these that are war-related is not definitely known by this writer. Of this mass the Department, during the year 1944, actually disposed of only 10,000 cubic feet.

Although in the Commerce Department there is neither a records officer nor a centralized records administration program, technical liaison with the National Archives is maintained through the Chief Clerk of the Department. Each bureau separately handles its own records problems and carries on its relations with the National Archives through its own administrative officers. The Department holds some 200,000 cubic feet of records, of which about 10,000 cubic feet were disposed of in 1944. The very important Surplus Property Administration, which handles the liquidation of wartime surplus materials,

has been transferred to the Department of Commerce. The records situation at the Department of the Interior is much the same as that at Commerce.

The Department of Justice, as may be expected, has important war-connected records resulting from the activities of its investigative units. The Department has recently appointed a records administration officer in the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Attorney General. He has authority to deal with all records of the Department, which amount to the impressive total of 800,000 cubic feet. Nearly 45,000 cubic feet of records of no further value, or more than 5 percent of the total holdings of the Department, were disposed of during 1944.

In the State Department the Division of Research and Publication handles all disposal and transfer matters. It has not been possible to ascertain the volume of State's holdings since they are in part scattered in consular and diplomatic posts all over the world. An involuntary disposal program occurred early in the war in lands overrun by the successful Axis armies. (A provision of the Federal Disposal Act of July 7, 1943, permits the destruction in time of war of records the retention of which would be prejudicial to the interests of the United States, but requires such destruction to be reported to the Archivist.)

The Treasury Department is a vitally important agency for both peace and war purposes, but it now lacks a definite records administration program. It had, however, for many years the valuable services of Miss Helen Chatfield, whose name and accomplishments are so well known in the archival field. Before being called to wider fields of action in the Budget Bureau, Miss Chatfield as Treasury Archivist instituted an excellent administrative reference service, helped in the establishment of filing systems and procedures whenever requested, and initiated records retirement surveys and disposal lists of recurring items. The survey conducted in 1941 under the auspices of the Committee on the Conservation of Cultural Resources, which appears to have been the last complete one, revealed 560,000 cubic feet of current and 77,000 cubic feet of noncurrent Treasury Department records, or a total of some 637,000 cubic feet. Naturally this volume has been materially increased in the intervening years. About 54,000 cubic feet of records were disposed of in the fiscal year 1944 and 40,000 cubic feet in the first half of the fiscal year 1945.

This fleeting survey of some of the old-line peace agencies indicates that many have not recognized the values inherent in good records management, that they depend on hit-or-miss methods of records disposition or retirement, and that some hesitate to appoint records officers of competence, knowledge, and experience, who are clothed with the

necessary authority for department-wide prosecution of the work and are given adequate staffs. Both current and noncurrent records needs would be best served by the appointment of such officers. Also, in order to attain their maximum usefulness, records officers should advise officials in planning procedures that will prevent the creation of unnecessary papers and that will properly identify records, should train personnel in files work, should continuously study filing systems, should know how to evaluate records from the administrative and legal viewpoints, and should not only plan but administer the entire records retirement program. This done, an adequate, well-arranged documentation of an agency's wartime activities should result rather than the chaotic mass of records archivists are often plagued with. It is gratifying to be able to state that many such enlightened practices are being followed by both the War and the Navy Departments, as well as by several of the nonmilitary agencies.

### *The Military Agencies*

#### *War Department*

The War and Navy Departments plus the temporary war agencies possess among them at least half of all the records of the United States Government, or between 8,000,000 and 9,000,000 cubic feet. The War Department's share of this imposing volume amounts roughly to 4,000,000 cubic feet, distributed in some 2,500,000 file drawers in various offices and depositories.

The Adjutant General in the War Department has been from time immemorial the record-keeper for the Army, but, prior to the advent of the National Archives, the emphasis, naturally, was not on records retirement or disposition. Through the activity of the Division of War Department Archives, now the War Records Office of the National Archives, the principles of records administration were carried to The Adjutant General's Office and there they bore fruit. On April 19, 1943, Memorandum No. 48 of The Adjutant General's Office established a Records Division charged not only with the responsibility for the receipt, preservation, and management of the permanent records of the War Department and the Army, but also with the "investigation, inspection and technical supervision of current record procedures and policies of The Adjutant General's Office." Thus the records disposition attack got under way. It was spearheaded by Col. Thomas Spaulding, who served in this capacity until his retirement from the service on July 1, 1943, when he was succeeded by Col. Ambrose White.

Upon the assumption of command by Colonel White, the Records

Division was organized into six branches, one of which, the Records Management Branch, is of particular significance to the topic we are discussing. This Branch constituted the technical brains of the War Department's remarkably comprehensive records retirement program. Several of the top figures in this Branch are former members of the National Archives staff, and to them are due in large part the breadth of scope, the precision of detail, and the direction of this largest of all the Government's retirement programs. It is no secret to say that the two principal figures to whom the utmost credit is due are Lt. Col. Wayne C. Grover and Dr. Robert Bahmer, assisted by an unusually well-selected staff both from the National Archives and from private business. To name any one of these would be to name all.

In 1943 this staff commenced and executed a questionnaire survey of all offices and installations of the War Department, and on the basis of this survey, supplemented by spot checks, the Records Division submitted before the end of the fiscal year some 150 disposal lists and schedules. They were appraised at the National Archives, and the disposal of the overwhelming majority of the records covered by them was authorized by the Congress. By mid-1944 the whole of the Military District of Washington and many posts, camps, and stations outside had been covered by disposal authorizations. Contemporaneously some 70,000 cubic feet of permanently valuable records, including the records of the American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-19, were transferred to the National Archives.

By 1944 the Records Division was able to initiate an offensive on field records. Under the capable leadership of Maj. Purcell B. Robertson, three flying squadrons were organized, each composed of one or two officers and a team of civilians experienced in the handling of War Department records. The three units divided among them the nine service command areas of the United States, and, armed with a manual of records already authorized for disposal by the National Archives and the Congress, they sallied forth to inspect posts, camps, and stations, and all service command headquarters. These expeditions resulted in the disposal of tons of records of no further value and the transfer to the National Archives of thousands of cubic feet of documents of enduring value. Today it may be said that the National Archives holds all the valuable nineteenth-century records of the Army and most of those through the period of the first World War. At the height of this campaign, from December 1943 through March 1944 inclusive, 70,000 file drawers of records were destroyed or transferred to the National Archives. It was estimated that this relieved the Department of the burden of maintaining 200,000,000 letter-size sheets of paper.

Emboldened by success as well as by the pressure of circumstances, about the time that General Eisenhower's armies landed in Normandy the dynamic and imaginative records high command in Washington broadened their own operations to include the entire world. By the spring of 1945 the Army had established and was operating 38 records-handling installations, ranging in importance from receiving posts to huge semipermanent depositories.

The Army records line-up as of 1942 stood as follows: Immediately necessary current records were held in The Adjutant General's Office in Washington; records of organizations were kept in High Point, N.C., by the Demobilized Records Branch; and the Discontinued Projects Branch in Omaha, Nebr., was custodian of civilian employees' records. In addition, many noncurrent records were stored in innumerable posts, camps, and stations throughout the country. This process of decentralization was further augmented by the establishment of a Records Branch in Savannah, Ga., for the noncurrent records of units going overseas as well as for records sent back by overseas units.

It did not take long to discover that the loss of time and effort resulting from such decentralization was immense. The Records Division, instead of jumping to the conclusion that reconcentration was the thing, carefully studied the issues and came to the conclusion that while a certain amount of concentration on a functional basis was advisable, there was an equally clear-cut need for strategically plotted reception centers and intermediate processing depots. The net result was the creation of two echelons of records installations. The first echelon consists of a major depository at St. Louis, Mo., and three specialized depositories also within the continental limits of the United States. One of these specialized depositories, the War Department Records Branch in Alexandria, Va., is charged with the temporary custody of noncurrent records from offices in the Military District of Washington and also with the processing and transferring of records of enduring value to the National Archives. This depository holds records from the General Staff, the Secretary of War, the discontinued offices of the War Department, and the headquarters of the Army Service Forces, Army Ground Forces, and Army Air Forces. Its present holdings are in 40,000 file drawers and amount to about 70,000 cubic feet. The other two specialized records depositories are the Signal Corps Depository on Long Island for photographic records and the Army Air Forces depository at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, for AAF photographic and contract records.

The largest depository, at St. Louis, contains records that were formerly held at High Point, Omaha, and Savannah. It was established because of the need to bring together mutually interdependent activities



and data and consists of six branches: the Demobilized Personnel Records Branch, Civilian Personnel Records Branch, Organizational Records Branch, Contract Records Branch, Clinical Records Branch, and Records Service Branch (Miscellaneous). There is a mutual dependency among the records controlled by the different Branches. Thus the demobilized personnel files, if they do not shed full light on a point, can be reinforced by the data in the organizational files and in the clinical records. One half of the 3,000,000 square feet of floor space in the St. Louis Records Center will be occupied by records in the custody of the above-mentioned Branches under the direction of The Adjutant General, and will include all procurement records except those of the Army Air Forces. The records of the Office of the Fiscal Director will occupy the other half of the Center.

The second echelon of installations includes 9 depots, one in each service command area in the United States, and some two dozen depots spotted around the world in the various theaters of war. The overseas depots receive the records of the commands in their areas and process them for return to the respective depots in the United States. In each of the depots in the United States are concentrated all noncurrent records of all installations in the service command, such as posts, camps, and stations, and they include the records of such technical services as the Engineer Corps, the Quartermaster Corps, and Chemical Warfare Service. In June 1945 the 9 depots held a total of 57,400 file drawers of records or about 90,000 cubic feet. As to the mission of these service-command depots, the War Department directive clearly states: "A records depot . . . is not a warehouse for the dead storage of files; neither is it an archival depository for the permanent maintenance of valuable records. The records depot is an intermediate depository through which noncurrent files are processed and in which they are administered pending either destruction or transfer to a permanent depository."<sup>3</sup>

To make this system work in a coordinated fashion the Records Division early realized the necessity for a common doctrine. Several tentative issuances in 1943 and 1944 were followed with the publication in 1945 of three well executed definitive works: (1) the War Department Disposal Manual, TM-12259, (2) the War Department Technical Manual of Filing Procedures, TM-12258, and (3) the Army Service Forces Manual on Records Depot Organization and Operation, M810.

What has been the quantitative result of all this effort? As previously stated, the total War Department holdings at the end of 1944 were

<sup>3</sup> Army Service Forces, *Records Depot Organization and Operation*, 1 (Army Service Forces Manual M810, 1945).

estimated at 4,000,000 cubic feet. In 1943-44, the first fiscal year that the program was under way, 225,000 cubic feet were destroyed; in the fiscal year 1944-45, 750,000 cubic feet met a similar fate; and in the first quarter of the fiscal year 1946, 225,000 cubic feet were disposed of. At that rate of progress the year 1946 will witness the disposal of a cool million cubic feet of useless records of the War Department. Truly an outstanding achievement, as it is the greatest disposal record in the administrative history of the Federal Government! It means that in a single year, in that agency of the Government alone, we shall be rid of a volume of useless papers nearly large enough to fill the National Archives Building.

### *Navy Department*

Even before the War Department began its program of records retirement, the Navy Department commenced action on the records disposition front. The Office of Records Administration, headed by Emmett J. Leahy, formerly a member of the staff of the National Archives, and later commissioned as Commander, USNR, was created in the Executive Office of the Secretary of the Navy in October 1941. With characteristic energy Commander Leahy set about the task of formulating and executing a program, which, however, from the records retirement angle, really began to mature only when the new Disposal Act of July 7, 1943, was passed by the Congress and approved by the President.

This program has already been brought to public attention in articles written by Comdr. Emmett J. Leahy<sup>4</sup> and by Lt. Comdr. Herbert E. Angel.<sup>5</sup> It is hardly necessary, therefore, to do more than hit the high spots and bring the story down to date.

The Navy's Office of Records Administration has maintained a somewhat different emphasis from that of the War Department's Records Division, but it too has actively pushed the disposition function. The work of the Office is divided into five fields: correspondence, current records, noncurrent records, administrative reference, and microphotography. The so-called streamlining of correspondence and the use of microcopying have been major objectives of Commander Leahy's office, and both of these activities appear to have paid solid dividends. It must be emphasized, however, that the bulk of the microfilm work has been undertaken not with the idea of disposing of the records filmed but rather in order to duplicate engineering records, particularly

<sup>4</sup>"Records Administration and the War," *Military Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 97-108 (summer 1942).

<sup>5</sup>"Highlights of the Field Records Program of the Navy Department," *American Archivist*, 7: 174-180 (July 1944). Commander Angel became head of the Navy's Office of Records Administration when Commander Leahy left the service in December 1945.

blueprints, so that every ship and naval installation in the world could be properly supplied with indispensable plans and details for the maintenance and repair of ships and works. Microcopying for disposal purposes has received but about 5 percent of the money allocated to microfilming.

Since 1943, when the disposal law permitting schedules came into effect, the Records Administration Office, spearheaded by Miss Adeline Barry, formerly of the National Archives staff, energetically pushed the coverage of all departmental records with comprehensive schedules. By means of these schedules, the disposal parts of which must receive National Archives approval and Congressional authorization, the disposition of each series of records is indicated, that is, whether the series shall be retained by the Department, transferred to the National Archives, or destroyed. Since July 1, 1943, 7 of the Navy Department bureaus, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, the Executive Office of the Secretary, and the Headquarters of the United States Marine Corps have been thoroughly covered with some 50 schedules, ranging in extent from a single series of records to many hundreds of series. Coverage has also been provided for all naval air stations, all naval districts, all training schools, some of the navy yards, and the United States Naval Academy. Perhaps the most notable of the 1944 schedules was that embracing records of all ships of the United States Fleet. Perhaps the most difficult to devise was the disposal schedule for the Marine Corps, which entailed extensive negotiations lasting several months and was finally worked out by the application of a new concept known as functional scheduling, which had been jointly developed by the War Department and the National Archives.

Thus by 1945 the Navy had provided, in the main, for the disposition of the records of its three general divisions—the departmental bureaus in Washington, the shore establishments, and the fleet. That did not mean, however, that the records administration staff could rest on its laurels, for, under the intense pressure for all-embracing coverage much of the planning, of necessity, had to be incomplete and sketchy. It was now a question of filling in weak spots, tightening the screws, obtaining precision in detail, in other words—to use a much-abused term—streamlining the job. In fact it is a never-ending job.

Unlike the Army, the Navy has never used the comprehensive questionnaire method of survey, but rather it has favored the personalized survey executed by small, trained teams. This is, of course, a worthy method but because of insufficiency of competent personnel it has meant that the original coverage could only be spotty, with many gaps left for later consideration.

The first naval records depository was established in February 1942;

designed primarily to serve the Navy Department, it was consequently located in Washington. The second was established in Philadelphia in December 1943, primarily with the mission of housing permanent records of civilian and military personnel separated from active service. A third depository was opened, in the Midwest, for the security storage of microfilm copies of vital naval documents. The fourth and, to date, the last depository began operations in Los Angeles on July 1, 1944. The 4 depositories have a combined total of about 180,000 square feet of space. Although this is far less than the Army's, the objective of the Navy's depots is somewhat different. They began as processing centers, rather than as semipermanent or long-term housing establishments, and there has been a rapid turnover of records material.

An interesting development in connection with naval depositories, however, must be mentioned. The past year witnessed a radical alteration of the mission and an expansion in the functions of the Philadelphia and Los Angeles Naval Depositories. These have now become, respectively, the Naval Records Management Center—Eastern Branch, and the Naval Records Management Center—Western Branch, and in addition to processing the records of shore establishments and decommissioned activities, personnel files, and ships files, they have assumed the execution of services, in their areas, formerly rendered directly by the Office of Records Administration in Washington. These additional services consist of correspondence management, current records management, administrative reference service, and microphotographic services. As Commander Angel has stated, the depositories have become "regional offices of records administration for the Navy, merely guided and coordinated by the headquarters office in Washington."

Now as to the figures that show the pay-off for the investment of capital, time, and effort. It has been previously stated that the probable total of naval records is in the neighborhood of two and a half million cubic feet. This is wholly an approximation since the Navy's surveys have not been as complete as those of the War Department. Since the establishment of the Office of Records Administration, some 40,000 cubic feet of records of enduring value have been transferred to the National Archives, thus about doubling its former holdings of Navy records. As a result, practically all permanently valuable noncurrent records of the departmental bureaus and offices of the Navy (with the exception of personnel records) through 1940 are now in the National Archives. About 10,000,000 documents were microfilmed by the Navy with the view to destroying the paper records. Somewhat over 100,000 cubic feet of records were transferred to naval depositories. As for disposal by destruction or sale as waste paper, up to January 1945 about 150,000 cubic feet were eliminated. In the first 6 months of the

present calendar year [1945], 70,000 cubic feet of material was disposed of. The total of Navy records disposed of to date may therefore be calculated at a quarter of a million cubic feet.

This brief sketch of the records retirement work in the armed services shows that there are considerable differences in emphasis, in organizational structure, and in methods of operation between the two services. The Office of Records Administration of the Navy has managed to do well with a split personality—part very vigorously concerned with current office practices and part devoted to noncurrent records disposition. The Records Division in the War Department has concentrated almost wholly on noncurrent records problems.

It should be obvious that in records retirement work both services present a decided contrast to most of the peace agencies of the Government. With some exceptions, there is no comparison between them in imagination, execution, and implacable drive. It is true that they had greater resources than most of the nonwar agencies, but both services deserve great credit for splendid work. And the National Archives can feel proud that men who learned their archival lore at the mother institution—even though it may have been not so much by precepts taught as by the good old-fashioned method of trial and error—were the originators and leaders of these programs, ably assisted by others in both staff and line positions. They have done a job unmatched in this particular phase of the administrative history of the Government of the United States.

### *Emergency War Agencies*

As the final section of this report, let us consider that large, amorphous growth of Government known as the emergency war agencies. They number approximately four score and range all the way from great boards and administrations known to everybody, such as the War Production Board, the Office of Price Administration, and the Selective Service System, to such comparative obscurities as the Agricultural Mission to Saudi Arabia, the Joint Mexican-United States Defense Board, and the Inter-American Coffee Board. The National Archives was determined, insofar as it lay within its power, that the neglect suffered by records of the first World War should not be the fate of those of the second. Everything related to the emergency agencies was approached and studied from the angle of their ultimate extinction. In fact, the newspapers could well headline the story of this work with the caption: BUREAUS DO DIE. But although some have become extinct, we must hasten to add that the number of the decently interred is still small and consists mainly of the infants.

In its records administration program, the National Archives gave



special attention to the emergency war agencies because their temporary nature made their problems more acute than those of the old-line agencies. The first and fundamental task was to make the heads of these agencies conscious of the records problem, to induce them to appoint duly qualified administrators to handle the problem, and then to afford these officials all the help and advice within the power of the National Archives.

To provide a sound basis for handling records of emergency agencies, some 30 studies and reports were prepared by the National Archives. These reports averaged from 10 to 15 single-spaced typed pages apiece, making a book of about 400 pages, closely packed with facts and figures relating to the records of the emergency war agencies of the Federal Government. Even with their admitted imperfections, the reports represent a records study of a scope probably rarely equaled in extent and amply testify to the Archivist's concern with this unprotected flank of Federal records management. And this work was done during a period when the National Archives, with ranks depleted because of personnel lost to the armed forces and other agencies, was forced to carry on its normal operations under a handicap. But no superstructure could be built until the foundations were laid, and to lay the foundations, test borings had first to be executed by someone. These studies represent the test borings, and, by and large, they have been useful.

Meanwhile, the Divisions of Estimates and of Administrative Management of the Bureau of the Budget began to study liquidation problems. In 1945 the latter division issued four *Management Bulletins* on administrative operations, one of which dealt with records, and a publication entitled *Agency Liquidation or Reduction: a Procedural Guide*, which included a section on records retirement. These bulletins were widely circulated among Federal agencies. They emphasized the responsibilities of "top management" in relation to records, including the designation of records officers.

The beneficial results of these efforts can now be seen. The records-officer situation is spotty, but some of the largest agencies have appointed such officials or are on the verge of doing so. The War Production Board has had a records administration staff since 1943, that of the Selective Service System has just undergone its second reorganization, the Office of Price Administration has recently appointed two able National Archives staff members to head up its records program, and the War Shipping Administration and Maritime Commission have done likewise. The Office of Censorship, the War Relocation Authority, the Office of Civilian Defense, and the Office of War Information all have had records administrators appointed or actively at work. And some of the agencies notably the Petroleum Administration for War, the

Office of Defense Transportation, and the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, have employed National Archives personnel on a reimbursable basis to survey their records.

The known holdings of the emergency war agencies amount to over 2,000,000 cubic feet of records, and the probably ultimate holdings will be about 2,500,000 cubic feet. In mid-1944 the rate of increase was reported to be about 300,000 cubic feet of records a year; the substantial amount of 292,000 cubic feet was reported to have been eliminated; and only 140,000 cubic feet were then in a noncurrent category.

In May 1945 VE-day arrived and with it the Governmental cut-backs commenced. In August Imperial Japan acknowledged its first war lost in the two millenniums of the Mikado's dynasty, and the pressure for agency terminations was on in full earnest. The test had arrived for whatever the Budget Bureau and the National Archives had been able to devise. Since then 6 agencies—the Central Administrative Services, the Office of Civilian Defense, the War Refugee Board, the Foreign Economic Administration, the Office of Strategic Services, and the Office of War Information—have actually passed out of existence. These do not include, however, the largest records-producing agencies; and the continuation of many of the functions of FEA and OWI by other agencies have kept a large part of their records in an active status. In process of termination today are the Office of Censorship and the War Relocation Authority. The great War Production Board has been transformed and reduced to the Civilian Production Administration, and the Office of Economic Stabilization has been changed into the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion. No Executive order terminating the Office of Price Administration has been issued, but the process of reduction has informally commenced, with a number of controls already eliminated and staffs reduced. Thus 3 months after VJ-day the score stands at 11 agencies either abolished or materially reduced in manpower, functions, and records.

As the informal structure of agency-termination now exists, six control and service agencies of the Government take part in the liquidation process. These are the Budget Bureau, which oversees the entire process, the Treasury Department, the General Accounting Office, the Civil Service Commission, the Surplus Property Administration, and the National Archives.<sup>6</sup> As far as the records of an agency are concerned, they are either destroyed, transferred to the National Archives,

<sup>6</sup> By an Executive order signed January 4, 1946, the position of Director of Liquidation in the Office for Emergency Management and a Liquidation Advisory Committee were established. The duties of the Director are "to further proper preparations, arrangements,

or allocated by the Budget Bureau to whichever permanent agencies inherit certain functions of the dying member.

The termination process began about VE-day and will continue indefinitely. The developments in peace and war since 1933 have unalterably placed this Government in direct responsibility for events in a host of social and economic fields critically interwoven with the daily life of the people. The Government will continue to be vitally interested in the problems of labor, capital, industry, commerce, agriculture, and in the welfare of the housewife, the college student, the soldier, the young, the middle-aged, the disabled, and the old. The relationships between them, the events that impinge upon the lives and activities of these people, are in a constant state of flux. Therefore Government agencies designed to execute the responsibilities related thereto must also be in a constant state of flux. From now on, many believe, the Government of the United States will continue to consist in large part of agencies that are in the throes of birth, obsolescence, and death; agencies that are being expanded, reduced, terminated, and transferred.

This trend is obviously of capital moment to archivists and records officers. It means we shall never catch up with a definitive arrangement of our records; we must maintain the utmost flexibility in our classification of records; we must have current administrative histories to record and illustrate the changes in jurisdictions, organizations, functions, and policies; we must ceaselessly push active disposal and transfer programs; we must devise quick and reliable means of administrative reference.

As seen in the Budget Bureau, the biggest problem is always the distribution of functions, whether of operating or terminating agencies. But immediately on the heels of this is the problem of records, which are also of prime importance. Members of the Bureau recognize that the National Archives performs a key function in this field and that the continuous retirement of Federal records is a necessity. The Budget Bureau and the National Archives in perfect team play can facilitate the establishment and operation of records retirement programs and can thus sensibly contribute toward efficient administration throughout the Government.

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and methods for the orderly and timely winding up of the affairs of the temporary Federal agencies created for the purposes of the war . . . particularly with respect to personnel, property, accounts, space, and records." The National Archives is represented on the advisory committee.