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SHORT SUBJECTS

Features

The US Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon, a Military Archives in Georgia

Kathyrn R. Coker

Introduction

There's a relatively new "kid" archives on the block. It's called the U.S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon Archives located in Augusta, Georgia. Augusta is not only the home of the Masters Golf Tournament but also the
home of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, the army's communicators since 1860.

Authorization

The United States Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon (USASC&FG) Archives, established in 1985, is authorized by the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Supplement 1 to Army Regulation 870-5 which states: "Commanders with historical offices staffed by Army Historians will establish and maintain a repository of selected historical documentation to serve as the corporate memory of the mission activities of the Command." Command or local level authorization is provided under USASC&FG Supplement 1 to AR 870-5, 5 February 1987, as amended, which officially establishes the USASC&FG Archives.

Purpose

The mission of the USASC&FG Archives is to document on a local level the history of the United States Signal Corps, the Signal Center, Fort Gordon, the military role in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA), and affiliated personnel. Effecting this mission not only records the memory of the Signal Corps and the installation, but also promotes the study of military history. The study of military history can strengthen today's military training, aid practical experience, and promote a deeper understanding of strategy, tactics, logistics, and the principles of war. It can also promote esprit-de-corps and pride in the military profession. In the words of former TRADOC Commander, General William Richardson, "We...want to use history to
impress upon the basic trainee the importance of his heritage, his place in the Army, why he is serving in that Army, and his responsibility to it."

**Location and Office Profile**

The USASC&FG Archives is located administratively within the Command Historian Office, which reports to the Chief of Staff. The archives is staffed by a professional archivist who is also charged with historical functions and reports directly to the command historian. Additional support comes from soldiers, volunteers, and college student interns.

**Access Policy**

As stated in the standard operating procedures (SOP), the archives is available for research and reference use by military and civilian personnel whose topic of interest falls within the scope of the collection. Patrons, of course, are not allowed in the environmentally controlled closed stack area. No records are loaned to patrons, with few exceptions, and all records must be used on site.

**Collection Policy**

With the information proliferation of this modern society, decisions must be made concerning which records are to be collected and retained. A collection policy has been adopted based upon directives from TRADOC and the installation command, the collection policies of the signal museum and the two installation libraries, and upon local information needs. This policy must be flexible in order to
meet changing directives and research needs. The focus of USASC&FG Archives is upon historically valuable but inactive records generated by, for, and about the Signal Corps, the signal center, Fort Gordon, the military role in the Central Savannah River Area, and on associated personnel. These records will be or have been appraised to be of such evidential, informational, and research value to warrant permanent (infinite) retention. Records not falling within the scope of the collection policy are transferred, if possible, to appropriate repositories.

**Records Collection**

Under a local Fort Gordon regulation, the installation's approximately forty unit historians and the command group point of contact are charged with assisting the Command Historian Office in identifying, locating, and transferring records of historical value to the archives. Usually these are inactive records no longer necessary in the daily operation of the office. There are exceptions, such as the roster of officers and signal center curriculum. If the unit historians wait until some records are no longer active, they will no longer be available for retention—lost. A lesson learned early in the program was that a compromise must be made between archival theory and practice. In addition to the unit historian network, the office has designed other procedures to aid in records collection, such as local records surveys, records schedules, news releases, and news stories. This records collection effort in no way supplants the U. S. Army's Modern Army Recordkeeping System (MARKS), which is actually a set of schedules mandating the
disposition of official army records. The best collection tool is the annual command history, a required publication documenting the installations’ significant activities from combat developments and Signal Corps training to base operations. Unit historians are required to prepare their directorate’s or organization’s annual report and to substantiate it with accompanying documentation. The Command Historian Office and archives then takes the reports and background documents and evaluates, analyzes, and synthesizes them into a 200 page or more comprehensive and integrated history. The fact that the 1990 annual command history had 20 cubic feet of documentation is indicative of just how successful this effort has been. The Command Historian Office and archives has quarterly in-progress reviews to keep the records collection educational process and momentum going throughout the year.

What Are Records?

This certainly seems a rhetorical question to the professional archivist, but certainly not to users. Archivists must stress that records are recorded information regardless of media or characteristics and may be in any format including videotape and machine readable data. For example, the Joint Universal Lessons Learned Data Base was created from observations made by a diverse audience during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. On a 55,000 acre post with over forty offices, it is imperative to educate creators and users of records on the idea that
historical (archival) records are defined as records in any format which have been appraised to be worthy of indefinite or permanent retention by the USASC&FG Archives and that there is no age or time limit on historical records. That is, the record does not have to be old to be of historical value. While this too may seem apparent, it merits mentioning since unit historians have received calls from individuals for example saying, "I guess you don’t want this map showing Vietnam War training villages here in the 1960s. You only want really old records, right?" Other callers ask questions such as, "These records concern training here in the 1970s. They aren’t current. You don’t want these, do you?" The archives is concerned in documenting the present, past, and future of those institutions and individuals falling within the collection policy.

**Processing**

Once records are transferred to the archives, they are acknowledged, appraised, conserved, arranged, accessioned, described, stored, and made available to users in accordance with archival practices and procedures.

Initially, the archives was on the tenth floor of the headquarters building, with minimal office space and no space to create an archives. After three months and a space utilization study, it relocated to a one story brick building with three offices and a large storage area equipped with an arms room. After spending one Georgia summer in the unairconditioned storage area during which some records suffered minor damage, the office convinced local authorities of the need for an environmentally
controlled area meeting archival standards. Soon thereafter, using specially designated funds, the storage area was upgraded and the archives actively began to collect records.

Installation Records

The USASC&FG Archives contains two broad categories of official records, installation records and Signal Corps records. The former are official records or copies of official records of the U. S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon, its predecessors (e.g., Camp Gordon established in 1941, the Signal Corps Training Center, the Signal Training Center, the Southeastern Signal School), and defunct organizations and schools, such as the Provost Marshal General School and the Civil Affairs School. Examples of installation records include annual reports, historical studies, signal center curricula, officer rosters, unit histories, training photographs, memorials, commander’s annual assessments, review and analysis reports, newspapers, oral histories, videotapes of special installation events, etc. These and other installation records were used to write a published history of Fort Gordon.

Signal Corps Records

The archives also retains records documenting the history of the U. S. Army Signal Corps, founded in 1860 by Brigadier General Albert J. Myer. The Signal Corps enables soldiers on the battlefield to communicate. Lieutenant General John J. Yeosock, commander of the Army Central Command (ARCENT) in the Persian Gulf War wrote:
With the execution of Desert Storm on 17 February 1991, the theater assumed a greater complexity and scope.... [A] numbered field army was employed... to coordinate the actions of the tactical corps conducting the theater main attack.... [Third Army’s] XVIII Airborne Corps and the VII Corps were the organizations that made things happen during Desert Storm.... While ARCENT headquarters and EAC (Echelon Above Corps) units set the stage for ground operations, it was the corps that maneuvered in southern Iraq and Kuwait to accomplish the objective.¹

This means that they could not have maneuvered without communications provided by the Signal Corps. The Signal Corps has been the U. S. Army’s communicators from the days of the wigwag signaling system, first tested in combat during the Civil War, to the Persian Gulf War’s electronic battlefield. Examples of Signal Corps records in the archives include reports of the Chief Signal Officer, Signal Corps technical bulletins, Signal Corps technical leaflets, after action reports (such as, 93rd Signal Brigade in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm); Signal Corps unit histories, Signal Corps photographs from the Civil War to the present, historical monographs, staff studies, special studies (such as, Headquarters Fifth Army, Office of the

Signal Officer, *Data On The Signal Corps In The Italian Campaign, 1945* and *The War Balloon "Santiago" And The Men In Her Life*); Defense Technical Information Center studies, military campaign maps, videotaped exit interviews with the Chief of Signal (the USASC&FG commander), oral histories, postcards, and diverse other records documenting the Signal Corps's history and its regimental motto "get the message through."

**Manuscripts Collections**

The archives retains personal papers (manuscripts) of individuals associated with the Signal Center, Fort Gordon, and/or the Signal Corps. These collections vary in coverage and format including, for example, correspondence, books, photographs, postcards, scrapbooks, newspapers, unit histories, memoirs and diaries, and other records collected by military and civilian personnel throughout their careers. These collections are either donated by the individual or his/her representative. The collections not only document the careers of the given individuals but also that individual's role in the history of the Signal Corps and/or Fort Gordon. Examples of manuscript collections include those of Brigadier General Albert J. Myer, chief signal officers Major General Spencer B. Akin, Major General George I. Back, Major General George S. Gibbs, and Major General David P. Gibbs; Lieutenant Colonel Reuben Abramowitz, who established the European Signal School at Ansbach, Germany; Signal Corps photographer Matthew B. Aitken; Verlin C. Blackwell, a Signal Corps radio operator during World War II who painted watercolors depicting radio
operations in Darwin, Australia; Major W. W. Keen Butcher, who served with the 34th Signal Company, 34th Infantry Division in World War II; Colonel Gerald Carlisle, deputy commandant and commandant of the Signal School from 1965 to 1966; Brigadier General Francis E. Howard, a former commandant of the Provost Marshal General Center at Camp Gordon and Camp Gordon's thirteenth commander; Vietnam War veteran Major General Norman E. Archibald, and Lieutenant General Thomas M. Rienzi, who among other assignments, served in command positions with the 96th Signal Battalion during World War II, commanded the 51st Signal Battalion in Korea from 1957 to 1960, and commanded the 1st Signal Brigade in Vietnam. A manuscripts guide to the collections is available.

Future

The Signal Center and Fort Gordon Archives recently received a grant for compact movable shelving. It was running out of space and the problem would compound itself with the records of Persian Gulf War and those collected during the fiftieth commemoration of World War II. The archives has gradually moved into the realm of automation with the purchase of MicroMARC:amc and is now coordinating with the two libraries on post to create a local area network. Access to the collections will also be improved with the installation of the Professional Office System (PROFS), an official electronic mail system. The archives is also striving to network with the U. S. Army historical community including other TRADOC installations, the Center for Military History, and the Military History
Institute; one long term goal of the archives is to be a vital link in that community's Automation Vision 2000. The Command Historian Office and Archives, along with its counterparts, continues to lobby for the importance of history and the historical mission. As LTG Charles A. Horner, commander of the U. S. Central Command Air Force in the Persian Gulf War, recently paraphrased, "People who fail to study their history are destined to repeat it...."2

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