



Greetings members and subscribers!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I want to personally thank all of the ARA members who have been working diligently on our congressional outreach endeavors. In particular, we appreciate the assistance of ARA members Roberta Russo of Illinois (35th Infantry Division Historian) and Steve Lamar (VP of Operation Benjamin), and Donna Esposito (Author/Historian) of New York whose participation in meetings with lawmakers has been incredibly helpful. We have made thirty-two presentations to congressional offices from both the House and Senate. At this time, we have eleven additional congressional meetings scheduled and we intend to schedule many more. We appreciate all you have done to date and encourage you to keep up the good work!

ARA board members are working hard to educate and inform congressional staff on the importance of our members' research work on behalf of the public and for veterans and their descendants. We emphasize to each lawmaker we contact that the work we do matters and that it cannot be accomplished without physical access to the holdings of archives and records centers nationwide. Our hope is that securing directed funding for the archives will help add to the number of public-facing staff, increase research hours, and upgrade the agency's IT system, ensuring utility for those conducting research remotely.

We at ARA are acutely aware that many of you endured significant emotional and financial hardship as a result of the pandemic emergency. We know your lives and your businesses, like ours, will never be quite the same. But we want to assure you that ARA will continue to work to improve access for all researchers. The circumstances that turned our lives upside-down in 2020 WILL get better and we look forward to seeing all of you back at work, doing research once things get closer to normal.

Geoff Gentilini

President

Archival Researchers Association

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Geoff Gentilini-President, Steve Greene-2nd VP, and I met with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) on Friday, February 19, 2021, for an hour of discussions concerning the access to their holdings, response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the reopening of public research rooms and the ARA's congressional ask for appropriations for FY 2022.

Many of our members and the public have voiced concerns to the ARA and NARA officials about NARA's delays in their reopening process. Some have questioned that if they can go to their local grocery store, restaurant, or church, why can't NARA open the research rooms to them. The answer is not simple. One must understand that NARA falls under the executive branch of government. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidelines direct their operation.

The April 20, 2020 Office of Personnel Management, and the Office of Management and Budget (Memo M-20-23), to align federal agencies with guidance the White House is now basically a moot point. The new administration is now guiding the safe reopening of government agencies such as NARA and others. The administration is now allowing 25% of the workforce to work on site. NARA said they expect further guidance on almost a weekly basis. Although NARA has no specific reopening set, they said that the first 100 days of the new administration's guidelines are paramount in setting that date.

In our discussions, NARA has been making headway with projects that employees can do remotely. Some NARA staff have heroically volunteered to work on-site, such as the NPRC and the US National Archives St. Louis, allowing emergency access to some essential records concerning veterans and the public's health and welfare. Staff at NARA A-2 in College Park are working remotely to digitize their finding aids and incorporate the data into the catalog. NARA said that researchers would not see this data in its previous form. The staff converts the scans to excel spreadsheet data and integrates it into the catalog itself. The team has also placed 24 terabytes of digitized RG-407, US Army Pacific theater of operations records, in the NARA catalog and the US Navy deck logs from 1969 to 1969, at the ARA's request. Lastly, A-2 staff will begin redacting PII from US Navy deck logs from 1970 to 1974. As the team completes the redactions, those deck logs will be made available in digital form in the NARA Catalog.

Finally, we discussed the ARA's efforts to obtain targeted funding in the amount of \$30 million from Congress for NARA's research services. We found many instances of common ground that we can agree upon and, of course, some issues where we differ. The ARA feels that none of our differences are too great to overcome, and we look forward to working with Congress and NARA to iron these out and get the needed funding for essential access to archival records at NARA.

Don Mounts

Vice President and Chair - Legislative Committee
Archival Researchers Association

2ND VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Like many of you, I'm very pleased with our progress in meetings with Congress. Our weekly meetings with NARA's Chief Operating Officer have reinforced for me that NARA is very cautious in its dealings with appropriators, recognizing the fact that they haven't previously had much support for the Agency's programs on the Hill.

This fact presents numerous opportunities for the Archival Researchers Association to step in as an intermediary between NARA and its appropriators, but is not without risks. I strongly believe that ARA needs to be seen as an advocate for all researchers depending on Federal Records available from the National Archives and not be seen as supporting solely the needs of professional researchers. As this is the inaugural year of the ARA, we need to take care to curate our reputation and our image on the Hill, among our peer advocacy organizations, and with NARA.

I'd like to once again ask our members to step up and contact their elected officials and also to leverage their memberships with other organizations with overlapping areas of interest. If you need assistance with making the initial contacts, please don't hesitate to contact our board members for advice!

Steve Greene,
2nd Vice President
Archival Researchers Association

SECRETARY'S REPORT

We would love to hear some of your research stories and how your efforts accessing archival documents have made an impact on a person or family. Please send a success story along with any photos you might have so that we may share in future newsletters or on social media. Send photos and stories to Myra Miller at secretary@archivalresearchers.org.

CLICK BELOW TO VISIT THE ARCHIVAL RESEARCHERS ASSOCIATION WEBSITE



CONGRESSIONAL PRESENTATION LIST UPDATE

The Archival Researchers Association's Executive Committee and board members have been meeting via Zoom/phone with congressional staffers to present the message of the need for public access to records and a proposal for NARA as set aside funding for research rooms!

Participating from ARA were President Geoff Gentilini; Vice President Don Mounts; 2nd VP, Steve Greene; Secretary Myra Miller; and Treasurer, Karen Needles. Several ARA members have served as presenters, including board member Bill Beigel and ARA members Ruth Danielson, Donna Esposito, Steve Lamar, and Roberta Russo.

Here is the complete list of 32 presentations that have been made on behalf of ARA members as of February 26, 2021.

State	Senator	Representative
Alaska	Dan Sullivan	
Arizona		Ann Kirkpatrick (AZ-02)
Arkansas	John Boozman	
Arkansas		Steve Womack (AR-03)
California	Dianne Feinstein	
Connecticut	Chris Murphy	
Georgia		Stanford D. Bishop (GA-02)
Hawaii	Brian Schatz	
Illinois	Dick Durbin	
Illinois	Tammy Duckworth	
Illinois		Mike Quigley (IL-05)
Kansas	Jerry Moran	
Maine	Susan Collins	
Maryland	Ben Cardin	
Maryland	Chris Van Hollen	
Massachusetts	Elizabeth Warren	
Minnesota	Amy Klobuchar	
Missouri	Josh Hawley	
Missouri	Roy Blunt	
Missouri		Ann Wagner (MO-02)
New York	Kirsten Gillibrand	
New York		Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)
Ohio		David Joyce (OH-14)
Oklahoma	James Lankford	
Oregon	Ron Wyden	
Rhode Island	Jack Reed	
Utah	Mitt Romney	
Vermont	Patrick Leahy	
Virginia	Tim Kaine	
Virginia		Gerald Connolly (VA-11)
West Virginia	Joe Manchin	
Wisconsin		Mark Pocan (WI-02)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOVA JOINS ARA

We are excited to announce that The National Organization of Veteran's Advocates, Inc (NOVA) has joined the Archival Researchers Association (ARA). NOVA's members are keenly aware of the importance of access to archival and non-archival records for veterans and their families. Our proposal to increase funding for the National Archives, specifically for its public-facing Research Services Division, is essential for restoring records access to a baseline of pre-pandemic levels so that advocates and the veterans they serve may acquire the documentation they need. In fact, we hope that our ongoing efforts will greatly expand access to archival records for the public. Thank you, NOVA, for your support of our mission!

NOVA: The National Organization of Veterans' Advocates, Inc. (NOVA) is a not-for-profit educational membership organization incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1993. NOVA represents nearly 650 attorneys and agents assisting tens of thousands of our nation's military veterans, their widows, and their families seeking to obtain their earned benefits from VA. Through training, advocacy, and support, NOVA works to develop and encourage high service and representation standards for all persons seeking VA benefits.

<https://www.vetadvocates.org/cpages/home>

ASK YOUR SENATOR TO SUPPORT K-12 HISTORY & CIVICS EDUCATION!

Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and John Cornyn (R-TX) have introduced the [“Educating for Democracy Act of 2020.”](#) It is the companion bill to one introduced in September by Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Congressman Tom Cole (R-OK) which will significantly increase federal financial support for history and civics education.

To learn more, please visit our webpage dedicated to supporting this legislation [here](#).

SECOND TOWN HALL MEETING TO BE SCHEDULED IN APRIL!

We are planning to hold a second Town Hall Meeting via Zoom for members to have a face-to-face conversation with the board members and ask questions. The date will be selected soon! We are taking questions now and plan to have answers during this meeting. Please send your questions or comments to president@archivalresearchers.org.

CALL TO ACTION: HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you have a connection to a museum, educational institution, or veteran's organization, please reach out and ask them if they would be willing to sign a letter of support for our effort to bring additional funds to NARA's research services. This will improve our chances of securing adequate funding levels for the research rooms as we begin to approach lawmakers. If we can demonstrate how important this issue is to the general public, it will strengthen our message exponentially.

ARA MEMBERS AT WORK

A THANK YOU!

I preface this letter intending to express the utmost appreciation, gratitude, and admiration for both Michael G. Bracey and Jaclyn Ostrowski for helping ascertain my grandfather's World War II and Korean War's military service, data and medical records. Their professionalism and efficiency of service is not only that of the highest excellence but also that of a kindred spirit in understanding the values of family legacy and love. In the spirit of trust and reliability, they hold truth to the power of integrity, ethics, and empathy. From my heart to theirs, I will always be indebted to them for helping me with my journey on searching for a lost family history.

Many thanks, Jorge Mercado

RESEARCHER HELPS WORLD WAR II VETERAN OBTAIN AWARD AFTER 75 YEARS

By Matt LeMasters

For 75 years, a World War II combat veteran believed that the actions for which he was court-martialed were the Army's reason for denying him the Combat Infantryman's Badge. Lying about his age, this veteran voluntarily enlisted in 1940 and was assigned to the 168th Infantry Regiment, 34th Infantry Division, serving with them during the pre-war Louisiana Maneuvers out of Camp Claiborne. In addition to his pre-war service, he also remained with his company and fought with them in North Africa and Italy and was wounded in the neck by shrapnel from a German machine gun bullet on May 6, 1943. Those who have studied the Mediterranean Theater of Operations know that the fighting in North Africa and Italy was particularly brutal, and this veteran, who had been promoted to Sergeant and was a machine gun section leader, had been mentally and physically drained by what he had experienced in both campaigns. According to a 1st Lieutenant of his company's First Platoon, "he and one of the other section sergeants practically ran the platoon."



After the first crossing of the Volturno River in October 1943, the veteran requested a reduction in rank because “I didn’t feel capable of leading men any more [sic]. I was at the stage where I just didn’t feel that I could handle it, so I turned my stripes into him [the company commander].” He was then temporarily assigned as a ¾ ton truck driver in the Second Platoon. After the company commander was killed, the new company commander relieved the veteran of this duty and re-assigned him to the First Platoon as a wireman. While in a rest area on January 2, 1944, the veteran and several other men in the company went AWOL to Naples after they discovered that they were soon to return to the frontline. Voluntarily returning to his company in June 1944, he was immediately confined to the regimental stockade. After staying at a disciplinary center for one year, he was restored to duty in October 1945, finishing up his service with a signal unit and being honorably discharged in February 1946.

I first learned about this veteran’s story in the summer of 2019. As a volunteer re-enactor with the Tri-State Living History Association, we seek to preserve the history of the 34th Infantry Division in World War II and interview surviving veterans. What was disclosed to me at that time was that this veteran had not received the Combat Infantryman’s Badge at his time of discharge, which he believed was attributed to his AWOL offense. After speaking with our organization’s president, I agreed to pull the records and confirm his combat service so that he could receive his award. Authorized in November 1943, the badge did not begin to be awarded until early 1944, the period in which the veteran was away from his unit. As such, he simply never received it because he was never included in the 34th Infantry Division’s general orders; not because the Army simply didn’t want to award it to him.

Fortunately, his service record survived the National Archives fire of 1973, which confirmed that he had indeed served in combat. In addition to that record, I also pulled his court martial record and all morning reports and rosters. After previously being denied the award after writing to his senator, the records I obtained from the National Archives, along with another letter explaining the story to his senator, finally allowed this veteran to receive his Combat Infantryman’s Badge so many years later.

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100% OF PROFITS RETURN TO THE ARA – SHOP BY CLICKING THE PHOTO BELOW!**

