

STATEMENT OF SHERROD ESAT FOR THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

These recollections are set down at the urging of Philip C. Brooks and in part in response to a series of written questions propounded in his letter to me dated 28 August 1976. Having just sold my Thoroughbred training farm in Carroll County, Maryland I now find time to write.

1933 was a great year to arrive in Washington. I should have graduated from the University of Denver with the Class of '33 but had not been able to accumulate enough credits what with operating a service station full time and going to school, too. I had done some work in the 1932 election campaign of Lawrence Lewis of Denver. After he arrived with the first New Deal Congress he offered me a patronage appointment in the Reading Room Division of the Library of Congress. Needless to say I took it, even though as a messenger at \$1,260 a year less 15% Roosevelt economy cut. My duties also included part-time work in the Congressman's office which was both stimulating and educational. Four years at the Library had a tremendous influence on my career. J. Franklin Jamison still stalked the American history deck as if he owned it. Herbert Putnam was in only his 36th year as Librarian of Congress, and Martin Roberts commuted from Baltimore in his high starched collar to superintend the Reading Room Division. On occasion I was called upon to use a 19th century letter press to record outgoing correspondence prepared by Mary Richardson, Roberts' most competent and kind secretary. Although in some respects the methods and the grace of the Library went back to simpler times, its pace in the thirties became hectic. My work was supervised, directed and inspired by such men as Verner Clapp, David Mearns, Willard Webb, Seymour Robb, Robert Gooch and others. The Reading Room had a great staff. By 1937 I had helped to establish the/genealogical reading room on deck 47 and was one of four SP4 attendants in charge. It was here that I first met Nelson Vance Russell, Director of Reference at the National Archives, who came in as a searcher.

From the time the National Archives staff began to be assembled, and Dr. Connor's office was still in the Department of Justice Building, I tried to arrange a transfer. This ambition was not realized until I finally received my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1937 with two years of credits transferred from George Washington to Denver University.

The people most helpful finally were James Preston, NA Administrative Office whom I had known as Librarian of the U. S. Senate, Congressman Lewis, and Nelson Vance Russell whom I had met as indicated above. My first job was with Jesse S. Douglass in the military records reference unit of Russell's Reference Division. He and I remained close personal friends for the rest of his life./Douglass died in 1965, never having returned to the Archives from his military service. My experience in LC and initially in NA determined my approach to archival problems throughout my career. I have always been a "reference oriented" archivist. The ultimate purpose in preservation of records is for use, initially for administrative and legal needs of the creating agency and finally for historical and other research ends.

In 1938 the National Archives underwent the first of a long series of re-organizations. In my experience relatively major ones occurred about every two or three years. This first one could be said to represent a bureaucratic victory for the chiefs of the several records custodial divisions (one for every cabinet department, the Veterans Administration, and a catch-all for various independent agencies). For the most part these men had first been appointed deputy examiners and were the first to exercise the Archivist's statutory authority to examine and appraise all extant records of the Executive Branch of the Government wherever located. The Divisions of Cataloging and of Classification were abolished and such of their functions as were compatible with an entirely new approach to arrangement and description of archives went to the records divisions. This was also true of the reference function except for operation of the central search room, the library, and coordination of reference correspondence in those cases where an inquiry cut across record group lines involving two or more records divisions. Work of the special examiners concerned with appraisal for disposal of particular records also went to the records divisions. These sweeping changes, for practical purposes, eliminated initial concepts of archival management attributable largely to Dorsey W. Hyde. His influence on archival equipment and housing of records was to last only until the National Archives felt the impact of the second World War in the shortage of steel for containers and in the demand for storage space for vast quantities of records. After 1941 there was little reluctance to transfer old records to NA. We accessioned in a decade what normally would have taken a quarter-century to Absorb.

Coincident with the reorganization of 1938 John Russell who had been chief of cataloging and Nelson Vance Russell director of reference both resigned. ~~Philip M. Hamer~~ Philip M. Hamer succeeded to the bifurcated/reference function. My supervisor Jesse S. Douglas, moved to the Division of War Department Archives to take charge of the reference function there while I remained with the central correspondence coordinating unit supervised by Elizabeth Drewry and Vernon Setser. ~~Late~~ Early in 1939, when Dr. Hamer denied me a promotion to a P2 vacancy in the central search room, I requested transfer to a comparable vacancy in the Division of Veterans Administration Archives headed by Thomas M. Owen, Jr. of Alabama. He was the son of the then Archivist of that State, Historian of the American Legion, and the nephew of two very powerful members of the Congress, Senator John H. Bankhead and Speaker of the House William B. Bankhead. Tom Owen did not hesitate to use his political clout and he made a serious effort to succeed Dr. R. D. W. Connor when he resigned as Archivist to return to the University of North Carolina. I was taken to meet Speaker Bankhead and importuned to try to influence the Senators from Colorado and Mr. Lewis on Owen's behalf. This I could not do even though I liked working for Owen and Neil Franklin his deputy. He was simply not qualified to be Archivist of the United States. Solon Justus Buck was. I was proud to have been permitted to take, with senior members of the staff, his and Dr. Ernst Posner's first course in the History and Administration of Archives offered for graduate credit at American University.

Mr. Owen held no grudge and I was advanced in 1940 to Archivist P3 in his division. Among notable events and projects in which I participated were the accessioning of the records of the War of the Revolution and the War of 1812 together with the personnel who had been handling reference service on the records for a generation; the WPA project to flatten all of the then folded pension records, perhaps the largest and most difficult repair and preservation effort the NA proper has accomplished; and the flattening, consolidating and alphabetizing into a single series [all of] some nineteen numerically arranged series of Bounty Land records. This last project made practicable a name search for genealogical or other purpose when the inquirer did not have the original bounty land claim number, which was usually the case.

Although I never worked directly for Dallas Irvine, he, from the beginning, by the very force of his personality and intellect exercised considerable influence on my own intellectual and professional growth. He encouraged the writing of my first professional monograph based on archival sources of the War Department, "The Banishment of Captain Meigs" published in Records of The Columbia Historical Society, Washington, 1940. Furthermore he and his staff, particularly Douglas and Frederick P. Todd were among the moving forces in The American Military Institute, founded in 1933 as the American Military History Foundation by such men as Dr. Alan Boyd of the Library of Congress and officers of the Historical Section of the Army War College, to promote a dialog between civil and military historians. ~~American~~ A somewhat strange objective in the thirties! For at least twenty years the staff of the Division of War Department Archives edited, wrote for and otherwise kept alive MILITARY AFFAIRS the quarterly journal of the Institute. Its last devoted archives editor was the late Victor Gondos Jr. who retired about 1964 as Chief of the Old Military Records Branch of the then designated Office of Military Archives. From 1939 to 1942/Wayne C. Grover was Irvine's deputy in war records. When war began in Europe in 1939, Irvine, under the auspices of the AMI, began a series of Seminar-Conferences on "Polemology" a term he invented to cover our study of "The Total Science of War". ~~These~~ The sessions continued at least monthly until the United States became involved in the war and members of the seminar began to depart for military service. During these years the Institute published a series of circulars and papers to which men like Alfred Vagts, of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, Harvey A. DeWeerd, and Hoffman Nickerson contributed. In 1940, the Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, spoke to a joint session of the AMI and the American Historical Association in Washington, and when he led FDR's second inaugural parade on horseback (probably the last Chief of Staff ever to do so) he responded/to seated the applause of a small group of AMI members/on the Balcony of the National Archives Building. These were stirring times for those of us who knew that we could not avoid involvement in the war. To me, it was a great loss that Irvine was not called to the War Department. Nevertheless his influence was felt through those who were his votaries.

During 1941 the workload of Marcus Price, Director of Records Accessioning and Preservation and the line officer supervising the chiefs of the several records divisions increased to the point requiring appointment of two assistants in his immediate office. One was James Cummings, expert in the technical fields of photography, motion pictures and sound recordings, and I was the other for paper records. I do not know why Price picked me, the junior P3 archivist on the staff, for this coveted P4 position. It was a challenge and a great opportunity for me. The first major task was to catch up on his reports. He was three quarterly and one annual report in arrears and Dr. Buck seemed to enjoy making life uncomfortable for Price. The latter would return from sessions with the Archivist absolutely livid with rage and frustration. Everything Price proposed was likely to be knipticked to the last or he would be lectured on such minutiae as the sizes of staples and paper-clips appropriate to be used on files and reports containing two or more pages. Price would not give the Archivist the satisfaction of forcing his resignation although later in the wartime regime of Dan Lacy he had to accept the lesser position of Chief of the Division of Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings. Unlike his treatment of Price and some others, for example Fred Shipman, whom he treated as a not too bright school boy, Buck was always gentle and kind to me, possibly because I went to him for advice very early when he was Director of Publications. My work with Price covered the full range of archival problems as well as those of administration. All reports, recommendations, and requests, funneled through him and there was much reviewing of formal documents and coordinating of actions with, between, and among the records division staffs. There was also salve to be applied to hurt egos and the oiling of clashing jurisdictional plates. Recall, for example, the abrasive conceit of Arthur Kimberly or the ideological differences of Schellenberg and Irvine which went back to their doctoral days at the University of Pennsylvania. The inter-office memos of that period - the system called for everybody to comment on everything - could frequently be characterized as erudite discussion of trivia. Imagine the shock to some at that time when we made the first survey to determine what volume of records

the National Archives Building would hold when we converted to vertical shelf-filing in cardboard boxes, or how much stack space allocated to civil records would be withdrawn for military records, or what priorities should be assigned particular records in stack locations safest from potential bombing attacks. Indeed, what should be relegated to the very top floors of the building to help shield the rest! After Pearl Harbor, to what extent should civil defense duty, firebomb watching, and security patrolling of the NA Building at night, be permitted to interfere with regular duties, and how could "volunteer" assignments be made equitable.

Beginning in late 1939, NA began ^{slowly} to lose staff members to the military draft. In 1942, call to active duty of reservists, volunteering for service and transfers to wartime priority jobs made ^{the flood} it a flood. Many vacancies had to be filled with new and untrained personnel. Others will have to describe what it was like to be in the NA after 1943.

My own transfer to The Adjutant General's Office, War Department, occurred in the Fall of that year. Perhaps Oliver Holmes can do it best since he became special adviser to the Archivist and was concerned with most of the wartime policy matters; but then there ^{were} also Dan Lacy and Dallas Irvine who were key men in internal administration for Dr. Buck. Suffice it to say here that the NA provided real leadership in the overall field of current records management with its publications and above all through its former personnel who fanned out through all wartime agencies to initiate new programs to meet the emergencies that occurred when old systems and inflexible officials failed. Edward Leahy, with the initial assistance of Robert Bahmer, was first with the Navy Department. Jess Douglas and Dan Noll were commissioned to work with Colonel Thomas Spalding in TAGO to rid the War Department of its backlog of old records. They were later succeeded by Wayne Grover and Bahmer in the evolution of a comprehensive War Department records administration/that was to extend into the post-war period as a prototype for the entire government. The reputation they made was largely responsible for their becoming successively the third and fourth Archivists of the United States. There were many other stars in other agencies. The influence of this first generation of federal archivists will affect the government's paperwork and the systems devised to cope with it as far into the future as we can now contemplate.

Grover came to the Office of The Adjutant General, traditionally the archival office of the War Department and the Army, by way of the Army Service Forces. Initially he had the unpleasant task of prodding his archives colleagues Douglas and Noll and the venerable Colonel Spaulding to expand the TAGO program as ASF wanted it. Impossible deadlines were set which forced the return to retirement of Colonel Spaulding and the transfer of Douglas to the Historical Branch, G2, later to become the Office of the Chief of Military History. /Grover was moveved into a reorganized TAGO Records Division as Chief of its management branch and he brought Bahmer from the NA as his/deputy. In fact it took the new team about six months to accomplish what ASF had demanded the old team do in about six weeks. Among the several new branches created in the records division was one called War Department Records Branch with the primary mission of taking custody of all noncurrent departmental records and effecting their appropriate disposition and servicing. Captain Hugh Flick, archivist of the State of New York before entering the Army, was appointed Chief of Branch and he chose me from the archives staff as his civilian deputy. This is not the place to recite the history of that branch or (that) of the War Department program. Grover did the latter service in his doctoral dissertation for American University ^{that} in 1946. It is appropriate to add here I remained with the Department of the Army after the war and when Bahmer followed Grover back to the Archives in 1947 I became Chief of Departmental Records Branch with a considerably expanded mission. The overall Army records management functions, however, went to Olon D. McCool who had been selected very early in 1943 by Grover to suceed him in the program management field. It was a wise choice. Incidentally I would have been unacceptable because the old TAGO Chief Clerk Jesse Powell, closest civilian adviser to The Adjutant General, considered me the National Archives spy in the War Department-Army program and he surmised that I was left behind to engineer early retirement of records, all important, especially personnelrecords, to the jurisdiction of the Archivist of the United States. Powell was the last bitter holdout among the old-line chief clerks of the Executive Branch in opposition to a central National Archives. Ironically it was McCool, who never worked for any agency other than TAGO who, over my objection, engineered the break-up of the records center system of the military agencies and a too early transfer of World War II records

to the National Archives and Records Service. Martin Claussen was Ken Munden, archivist of Departmental Records Branch in 1949-50, and he and I were among the few critics of the Hoover Commission recommendations as promulgated by Ed. Leahy. We disliked especially the provisions of the Federal Records Act of 1949 respecting the establishment of GSA Federal Records Centers and foresaw that the intermediate depository systems of the several major government agencies would fall to the GSA-NARS/ bureaucratic empire builders. For the Defense Department this happened in 1958 as a result of budget pressure on the agency custodians and the machinations of NARS. We had managed to defeat the first attempt to take us over in 1954 when GSA proposed an "independent" study at their expense to demonstrate that GSA centers were cheaper and more efficient than those being operated by the defence agencies. Ed Leahy, director of the study team and Herbert Angel then heading the Navy program, had to admit reluctantly that while GSA centers were shown to be cheaper there were qualitative aspects of the Army depository programs that were not comparable with GSA centers. Even in 1958, I was not reconciled and I told the then Adjutant General, Major General Herbert Jones, in Olon McCool's presence that I considered that The Adjutant General was selling his 'birthright' as the administrator of the Army's noncurrent records depositories. It was my view then as now that only the agencies of origin of records will devote sufficient funds and manpower to the administration of records in the intermediate stage requisite to insure their full and proper exploitation and the careful selection of those series that will be preserved permanently in the National Archives. Such a program was already in use by the Departmental Records Branch and selected series of World War II records had been transferred to NA before 1958. In spite of assurances to the contrary NARS gutted the Departmental Records Branch programs when it was absorbed by Federal Records Center, Region III, in Alexandria and a portion of even later when the Branch became the World WAR II Records Division of the National Archives. In manpower terms some 74 positions from the TAGO branch to the World War II Division had been reduced to 50 by 1960, Not to save the taxpayer money but to implement other NA programs. Theodore R. Schellenberg, then Assistant Archivist for the National Archives, took particular delight in eliminating such archival innovations as the Departmental Records Branch Cataloging System for selected describable published archival items which according to its rules began with the series, all of which were cataloged without exception, and extended to file items defined and even single documents on a selective basis. *I was disappointed, The*

cataloging system had passed the professional scrutiny of both Dr. Buck and Dr. Posner and it was the subject of a lecture in Posner's course on the History and Administration of Archives, One of two I gave annually for about ten years for Dr. Posner. Grover had said on greeting my staff at the time of the 1958 transfer that we were to be 'integrated' and indeed we were! Perhaps my most serious disagreement with NARS policy as it evolved under both Grover and Bahmer was over personnel classification. I had no great objection to raising educational standards for entrance to the profession, although I did point out that a serious, not to say 'hungry', applicant with an AB degree might make in the long run a better or at least a more satisfied archivist than a disillusioned doctoral candidate. Particularly so with the proper inservice training and reasonable promotion opportunities. When trainees enter at GS 11 there are bound to be disappointments when promotion is slow and the archival duties pedestrian. My complaint was that we did not deal justly with those who had gained their expertise through experience and had, while in another agency, been granted professional status as archivists in accordance with Civil Service Commission standards. I could feel only admiration for the integrity and pride of the best reference archivist yet to be developed on the World War II period, Wilbur J. Nigh, when he chose to retire rather than accept a GS13 position, offered about four years later simply because he had no college degree! The record of the National Archives with its own subprofessionals was in my judgment unfair and unfortunate for the agency from the beginning. We lost to other agencies and to other fields of endeavor many potentially first rate archivists, People who with a little encouragement and the knowledge that the arbitrary barrier might be crossed could have held their own with the best of us.

Not the least important purpose of the NARS reorganization of 1960 was to ease T. R. Schellenberg out of line responsibility for all programs of the National Archives proper and into a newly created Office of Records Appraisal. To some degree this was a reversion to the special examiner system with which the NA started and it meant that this function was removed from the custodial records divisions or rather the newly created Offices of Civil and Military Archives respectively. The two new assistant archivists heading these offices were Herman Kahn, brought back to NA from the FDR Library, for civil archives and G. Philip Bauer who had

been Shellenberg's deputy under the previous organization, for military archives. My World War II records division, still physically located in the old Naval Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, Va., reported to Bauer. It was not until two years after my retirement in 1966 that the division was split, part going to the NA annex at Suitland, Md., and part to the NA Building proper. It is a sad situation to have major record groups, both civil and military divided as they are between the two locations. To this day personnel of the NA itself seem unable to understand the basis of records, or criteria for the division/much less research scholars who have to use the archives in both places. There were ways to avoid this situation, one of which I strongly supported insofar as military records were involved. We should have acquired the Old Pension Building and developed it into a first class genealogical research center thus relieving the NA Building of genealogical research sources, such as military personnel, pension, bounty land, and census records, as well the search room load represented by the genealogists themselves. This is still an attainable objective that could be 'sold' to the patriotic societies as well as the veterans organizations and genealogists.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, brought about another major reorganization in the National Archives. The Office of Presidential Libraries was created and Herman Kahn was designated to head it. Philip Bauer was moved to the Office of Civil Archives and I became Assistant Archivist for Military Archives and acting director of the World War II division. Pressure on the Office of the Archivist was extreme in the years 1963-65, but others can better explain Wayne Grover's decision to retire in 1965, in order to be more effective from the outside in achieving his objectives. Robert Bahmer succeeded Grover with the understanding that he intended to serve only two years and in that period would prepare a younger man from the staff to succeed himself. My own understanding with Bahmer was to the effect that I would stay on as long as he did provided that I would not have to assume new duties. In 1966, however, Bahmer found it necessary to combine the Offices of Civil and Military Archives and recreate the position of Assistant Archivist for the National Archives and I was made acting assistant archivist in the new position. I served six months and as expected found the job so uncomfortable that I determined to retire at the end of the year with 33 years of Federal service. That was enough!

What follows is amplification on Dr Brooks' specific questions about my career and my views on subjects not necessarily directly connected with NA. As previously indicated, my views on reference service were initially shaped in the Library of Congress and they were enhanced by experience in the NA reference division with Douglas, Drewry and Setser. The War Department, and particularly The Adjutant General's Office before 1943, were noted for their restrictions on access to records. Men like Jesse Powell operated on the assumption that those interested in using generally records were/yellow journalists or 'muck-rackers' looking for sensational stories. Security classification before World War II was not the problem. Restrictions were based primarily on personal confidentiality and avoidance of political embarrassment. I recall that when Secretary of War Woodring and President Roosevelt interceded in a case on behalf of the Chancellor of Michigan State University, Jesse Powell trotted out his celebrated 'Annie Jones' case and convinced those high officials that access would reveal such unsavory events as would reflect adversely on the reputations and the memory of famous soldiers and statesmen. The NA together with the new generation of War Department records administrators soon quietly opened for research such notable collections as the amnesty papers and records of the Bureau of Refugees, Abandoned Lands and Freedmen for the post-civil war period that TAGO had kept virtually closed for seventy-five years! Robert Ballentine, formerly with the NA, and Dallas Irvine played major roles in opening up old military records on which TAGO had placed restrictions at the time of their 'physical' transfer to NA in the period 1938-41. Access to World War II records in the post-war period was primarily my problem in Departmental Records Branch. Fortunately General Eisenhower, when he became Chief of Staff ~~succeeding~~ ^{General Marshall} took the position, concurred in by Marshall, that the Army had no right to hide behind a cloak of 'Secrecy', i.e., military security classification, its mistakes during the war. He established a General Staff committee, on which Bahmer served for The Adjutant General, to promulgate what came to be known as the Eisenhauer Policy on Declassification and Access to records by responsible scholars and writers. Because of the impossibility of case-by-case mass declassification, a substitute procedure gradually evolved, the basic elements of which were: a. Written application by the researcher for access to relevant records on a specified subject. b. Survey of the records problems, including declassification, expected to be encountered by the

custodian, and consultation with the researcher in the premises.

c. Report to the Army Chief of Information, if declassification was not practicable, with a recommendation that the researcher be cleared for access to classified information, not to exceed SECRET, for background purposes provided he agreed to submit his manuscript/for security review before publication and before removal of the notes from the depository. With minor modification from time to time this procedure held up even during the McCarthy hysteria, and by 1958, DRB alone had declassified / or secured the declassification by the office of origin of more than 60,000 key documents and bulk-declassified hundreds of shelf-feet of socalled automatically declassifiable categories of records under pertinent DOD directives and declassification orders. More important, with no major violation of security, we had facilitated the work of hundreds of scholars and other writers who produced the vast published literature covering the experience of the Nation in World War II and its aftermath. This does not include, of course, our efforts on behalf of the staff of the Office of the Chief of Military History and other official historians.

Executive EO 11652

It is unfortunate that President Nixon's Order of 1972/on security classification and declassification could not have remained as originally drafted, at least as it pertained to total automatic security/declassification after 25 years. The system as it has evolved is slower and more costly than it should have been considering actual accomplishment. I am disappointed that NA did not or could not devise procedures that would have accomplished some desirable archival arrangement and description byproducts of the declassification effort in which it is engaged. The work that Wilbur Nigh, Kenneth Munden and I did for the Army in 1972-73, to carry out its responsibilities to NA under the EO, did at least make a start in producing a useful finding aid for the NA staff, in locating and delimiting the scope of the classified records series that had to be reviewed and security classification/ removed. (A copy of a 'sermon' on this subject, THE SECRECY DILEMA, delivered by me at the Unitarian Church of Arlington, Virginia, on June 25, 1972 was at that time submitted to the Deputy Archivist, James O'Neil and is presumably available there or in the files of Mr. Thompson's Declassification Division.)

AGREEMENT WITH THE
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
AS TO HISTORICAL STATEMENT

I, Sherrod E. East, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, in accordance with the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-110), hereby assign to the United States for administration by the National Archives and Records Service all my rights, title, and interest, including any literary property rights that I may have in them, in the statement made by me at the request of Philip C. Brooks on behalf of the National Archives and Records Service at Washington, D. C., on June 15, 1977.

It is agreed that the statement will be available for study under the regulations prescribed by the Archivist of the United States as soon as the final product has been deposited in the National Archives. It is also agreed that only the National Archives and Records Service shall have the right to publish or authorize the publication of the statement in whole or in part, aside from quotation in the normal concept of "fair use", providing that I or my heirs, legal representatives or assigns retain the right to publish in other form the statements or facts set forth in the writing in question.

Signed

Date

Accepted:

Signed _____
Archivist of the United States

Date _____