

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview
Subject: Stanley Tozeski
Interviewer: Jack Kabrel
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MR. JACK KABREL: This is Jack Kabrel. Today is Monday, July 25, 2016. I am conducting an oral history with Stan Tozeski. This interview is part of the National Archives and Record Administration's History Office Oral History Project. Welcome to Waltham once again, Stan. Good to have you back. And we'd like to start this interview. Please provide a brief overview of your career with the National Archives in one or two minutes.

MR. STANLEY TOZESKI: Okay. Well, my career with the National Archives kind of started while I was at West Point. I had no archival training at all before going to West Point, and they immediately sent me to Washington because the National Archives was training other archives people from all over the country. I was able to get right into the first basic Archives administration course, and I went back there over the years; got to know a few people, and a few of the offices over there. So, I had kind of a familiarity with National Archives while I was at West Point.

Then, I was offered a position here in Waltham and transferred from the Military Academy to the regional branch here. That was my first introduction to the National Archives as an employee. I started here, transferred over, and there were only three people in the office: myself, Jim Owens, and a technician. They had me in to do truly archival work—but most of the people who were involved were genealogy and research assistants.

When the Regional Archives expanded, they were looking for people to come in and work with the records, catch up on the description backlog, and so on. Anyway, when I started, I did for the first months, maybe in the year, did a lot of work for genealogy in the Reference Room; fetching microfilm and getting out the bound volumes for researchers, and so forth. I never did the truly archival work; I did mostly genealogical assistance. As the staff expanded I was able to get away from the public operation there, and just work on things in the back room, which I was really hired to do.

I came into a GS-11 here because it was a promotion from my GS-10 at the Military Academy. I just gradually became an assistant to Jim Owens, and just anything to do with the Archives branch. It wasn't assistant director at the time, but it was getting into just the support for a lot of the things that were necessary to be done, and just didn't have the staff or time to do.

MR. KABREL: So, the years that you worked with the Nation Archives would be 1977?

MR. TOZESKI: January of '77.

MR. KABREL: And until January...?

MR. TOZESKI: January of '01, 2001. So, it was 24 years.

MR. KABREL: Wow. That's quite a career. Take us back to before you came to the National Archives. Let's talk a little bit about your education, and then your decisions after your education, which led you, eventually, to the National Archives?

MR. TOZESKI: Okay. My education was a Bachelor's of Arts in History from Clark University in Worcester, and then after that, a Master of Arts in History from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. I took the Federal Service entrance exam, and after some active duty military time, I was able to get a position at the U.S. Army, right down the street here in personnel administration—human resources today. I worked there for six years, doing all sorts of personnel hiring and recruitment; I just didn't want anything to do with a personnel office.

After six years, I realized that wasn't where I really wanted to be, and I was starting to look around the Federal Times for positions where I could use my history background. Sure enough, after six years at the labs, a position opened up at West Point. It was formerly a National Archives archivist there; a fellow named Joe O'Donnell, who came from Washington to West Point. He passed away, and they were looking for someone to replace him. I didn't have any training in archives and so forth, but I had the two degrees and I interviewed for the position. A librarian up there said, "No, you can do this job," and so forth. "Your background is such that we're confident that you can do it." I was apprehensive, of course, at first.

We left for West Point in the summer of 1969—in the heat of summer of 1969—and entered there as a GS-9 archivist. Took a downgrade from my personnel position to go there, and I remained there for seven and a half years. The archivist of the military academy was the librarian. He was a three-hatter: he was archivist, historian, and librarian at the Academy. I was dead-ended at my position. I had gotten a promotion to the GS-10 but that's all I was going to go, there.

Then, because I had been contacting the National Archives over the years—John Scroggins and Roseanne Butler, and so on, and so forth. They approached me to say, "Would you be interested in going? We're expanding our branch up in Waltham." Knowing that I was in Massachusetts, they said, "Would you be interested in going back there with a GS-11? That sounded pretty good. So, he said, "Sure, we did." So, the first years were good. There was a little bit of everything archival there. They had all types of records: textual records, paper records; everything except electronic records. Experience there was very good. Military history was my thing, so I was happy there, but the opportunity to come back to Massachusetts where the promotion was enough to get me here.

MR. KABREL: Did you learn to become an archivist, not having much archival background before you got here?

MR. TOZESKI: Yeah, they had people on the set. The archives was part of a library at West Point, and there was a special collections library there, and the archives were under the special collections at the time. He didn't know much about archives; he was a real book guy. Then the librarians, and the assistant librarians, didn't know much about archives on their own, so I was kind of on my own. They sent me regularly to Washington, for any kind of training that the National Archives was offering, or that the Army was offering. I picked up things on my own, through osmosis, and so forth; between contacts in Washington, and getting into the business of learning the academy system.

One thing they wanted me to do when I got there was to finish up a preliminary inventory that Joe O'Donnell had started, but didn't do much work on. I was told when I got there that the primary job was to get that inventory up, which I did. The Academy's Archives were really a special archive under the National Archives. They were allowed to remain at West Point—a special agreement with the archivists, and the archivists of the Army. Later on, that was followed by the Naval Academy doing the same thing, and the Air Force Academy. Anyway, they were the first, and this was back in 1953, I think. The fellow that was a librarian at West Point, this guy named Sydney Forman who was pretty well known in the history field as well.

Between the daily routine, reference routine and records management routine, and all of the other enjoyable things that went on at West Point, I was able to pick up some archival skills, and so I did not come to the National Archives totally unprepared. I was a much better archivist in 1977 than I was in 1969.

MR. KABREL: What kind of formal training did you have?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, I attended the institutes—the basics of archival administration while I was working for the Army. There were special classes in preservation management, disaster planning, and that sort of thing. While I had some of them at West Point, I continued to do that when I came here at Waltham. When I got here, the more advanced archives administration, for example. Eventually, I got to go to some special courses for archivists that weren't at the entry-level; they were something at the higher level. Then I got to go to the assistant directors' meetings. You got some special training there, you got to meet people, you got to walk around various offices. It worked out very nicely.

MR. KABREL: Describe your first day on the job with the National Archives.

MR. TOZESKI: I remember it very well. I had a migraine. I had to go to downtown Boston—this was the first day out of the country, there. I hated coming to Boston. I had to come down to get sworn in by the GSA. I remember coming in from the north, 93 or whatever it was, and there was terrible, terrible traffic. It was probably typical daily traffic, but I had never experienced it before. I got to GSA; sworn in, I had such a night. I turned around and came home. I never got here the first day. I said, "This is not a good sign." But the next day, I was better when I came back. That was my first day. I had met Jim a couple of times, while he was attending the Archives' directors' meetings in Washington, so I knew of Jim, and I didn't know of anybody else here.

MR. KABREL: What was your role here at this time? You were hired, at that point, in January 1977?

MR. TOZESKI: Yeah. As a general assistant to Jim Owens. I think, as I said, most of it was anticipating getting in there and doing truly backroom archives work in the stacks. Initially, I had to go learn how this operated, and there was a lot of genealogy involved at first. My role was typically research room, reference room, and working with the public.

MR. KABREL: You also had to work with the Federal Records Center, which was a huge presence here, right?

MR. TOZESKI: Uh huh.

MR. KABREL: What was that like? Did you know much about the Federal Records Center? And how it interacts with the Archives?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, yes. I got to know them very easily. I got to know the people, the archivists in this side of the building and so forth. We'd work with them getting records transferred to the Archives. I had no problem at all with the Records Center people.

MR. KABREL: Describe some of your functions that you've formed over your time at the National Archives; the various groups that you met—you mentioned genealogy. Describe other organizations and groups that you worked with.

MR. TOZESKI: Well, our clientele included academics; you know, professors who were doing research on certain things, and students were coming all the time. So, there were some academics. I was a member of the Council of America's Military Past (CAMP), and a lot of the people in this area were interested in post-artillery forts. And there were quite a few of them that were looking for records on military facilities in New England. They pushed the researchers to me and I was able to assist them, because I got to know the records, and so forth. I assisted them quite a bit. Did some work with the volunteer program, initially with the volunteer program, but I was never involved too much in going out and speaking to school groups, or rotary clubs, and so on, and so on. Jim and others pretty much took care of that. My clientele were mostly visitors to the facility, here.

MR. KABREL: And what would you say your daily activities were? You pretty much were processing archives?

MR. TOZESKI: Yes, which I enjoyed doing. I enjoyed working in the backroom, getting my hands dirty. That was always the part of the day you could pick and show the work, but just preservation work, and then doing description work, and it actually ended up into the National Archives A1 system, or whatever it's called now. I enjoyed doing that. There were some things that were kind of left undone when I arrived here. The court records, for example, were not in inventory. So, Jim wanted me to do a Record Group 21, finish up on that, which I did. And all that stuff was put in over the years. I think that was one of my major accomplishments. But between doing the daily reference letters, people walk in, and the

phone calls, and doing the work with the actual records in the back room, I liked to vary my day; I just got tired of doing the same thing all day long.

MR. KABREL: Describe some of the collections that you dealt with.

MR. TOZESKI: I enjoyed all the military records. The Navy yards, and the Navy facilities, like torpedo stations, and whatever else was in the New England area. Boston area, army bases, First Naval District, and so on. I enjoyed working with military records, so I tried to do most of those, and a lot of those come up from Washington. The court records were very interesting. I was amazed at how much information was in the court records. I got to know them very well, all the New England cases within the courts. I never had any law training, or legal training, at all and I just got to work with the records and saw how much information was in the court system records, and I got to enjoy working with those as well. That got a lot of business from the public; lawyers looking for cases, people coming in looking for naturalization records and things like that.

Some are big collections; some are small collections. As the records were regionalized, and they'd be in half a dozen boxes and so forth. That was always something I could look forward to. I'd say, "Well, I can do this. I can't do everything. I'll do the preservation work, the description work, and so forth." Because there was an ending. That was always doable in a certain period of time. But others were continuous, long term things, never-ending records work, completions over the years, and so forth.

MR. KABREL: Any historical surprises did you unearth?

MR. TOZESKI: I can't think of any right now, but like I said, there were an awful lot records and an awful lot of information in the court records, of all different kinds, and it was always—you know, even the routine equity cases, and law cases, and so forth had names I remembered from the past, and product names that I remembered. So, it was always kind of fun to get the files out for that.

MR. KABREL: Compare—and contrast as well—your experiences with the West Point Archives and the National Archives. How were the two similar, and how were they different?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, scope alone, the National Archives is so huge, and the entire country—you just didn't have the little campus and post of West Point, and so forth. We had records at West Point that went back to 1802, but they were mostly academy records. There were some post records there as well. But they were kind of the same records you get. You know, photographs, bound volumes, loose papers; you know, physically, the same type of records but so much fewer of them at West Point.

The overwhelming amount of records that were in this building, for example, between the non-permanent records and the ones we had in the Archives, I said, "Wow, this is amazing." And this is just New England. The size of the collections itself, and the area and the scope of the collection were much, much different so forth. And so many more people at West Point didn't have anybody to turn toward to get the onsite assistance. But the National Archives, not only here, but in Washington, the contacts and so forth, you can go for help and assistance, or a call or so forth. It would help me out. We

didn't have that at West Point. So, I would say, between the assistance available, training available, that was two big differences there to the two facilities.

MR. KABREL: Describe for me the social atmosphere of Waltham, Massachusetts in January 1977. And if you can, address it through the years and how, maybe, they changed or not changed up until your retirement of January 2001.

MR. TOZESKI: Well, social environment.

MR. KABREL: Social environment. People that have come here; the regional administrators, the directors. Did you interact? Were you like a family unit? Were there issues that you had between you? Was it like a family? Any stories that you want to impart about the environment within this building?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, in '77, when I first came here, the director was Wendell Evans. I think he was out of Washington for a while. I didn't have too much to do with the director. Just Jim—just the three people in our office—and that was it. I don't remember it being a very active, socially, at that time. But as the staff at the Archives grew, and staff at the Records Center was growing, also, the change in directors—it depended. Matt Teasley was here for a while. And then when we separated from GSA, other people came in.

I think, socially, if you mean by gatherings, and parties, I think Diane LeBlanc brought that in. And I don't know whether a lot of it was her own fondness for bringing things in, and having events, and so forth, or whether she was directed to do that in Washington. I always thought it was show business, you know? I had participated and enjoyed everything that went on, but some of the things I thought were kind of infringing on my time, from being more productive and working with the records that needed to be worked on. There were open houses, and that sort of thing, which Jim mostly handled that. But we all had to take part, and so forth. So, I think by the time I left here, it was a lot more social, a lot more activities going on. There wasn't any bowling league, or off-post activities, if you will, or offsite activities. There was much more going on 2001 than 1977. And, of course, I enjoyed working with all of them. I don't remember disliking anybody.

MR. KABREL: Okay. During your time with the National Archives was from '77, and even before, from '69 with West Point until 2001. During that time, there were lots of technological changes. Can you address the pros, cons; what happened during that period?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, the computer came. That was a big thing. I'll always remember, the word was, National Archives was pretty slow computerizing their records on the computer and on the Internet, and so forth. So, they were slow in coming around. Personally, I had no computer training except for one—something that the local civil service thing sponsored downtown. I was totally lost. I just did not get computer work and electronic anything. And so, I was not able to do things. But I'll put it this way: it was not required at the time anyway. I could do a lot by hand, filling out forms, and so forth. I did not have to input it onto a computer or into a databank of any kind. By the time I left, they were getting really into the swing of things. Fortunately, we had Helen Engel here on the staff, and she did a lot of the

input work directly, but she used to computers, and so on, and so forth. I, personally, was not. I think I could handle an email or that sort of thing, but that's it. I didn't know anything beyond that. So, I could have been probably more—I didn't know how to go out and use a laptop, for example, if we were out on a site someplace. Didn't know anything about it. I said, "I'm going to get my entire career here without having to deal with computers." My wife has always asked me on that, and she said, "You almost did that." I said, "Well, yes, I did." I wish it was more, for me, that I had done more, perhaps. But I was not comfortable with it; I never got a really good comprehension of the whole business of computerization, and all the things that were involved. Technologically, that was the bigger change. I did leave- before getting really heavily involved, and other people didn't tell her. But I mean, Joni, for example. All the stuff that wasn't able to be put in by hand, Joan was able to put into the A1.

MR. KABREL: Archival-wise, do you think that technology is a good thing or a bad thing?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, I guess as far as quick access and ready access, you know, a lot of the time, so much of the stuff is now online, apparently. The business next door has dropped considerably, I understand, so people are able to do things from home. For the genies (genealogy), who would have to come here to use the records, and now you can go online and get the information, because it's a part of the thing they're used to doing. Some things are never going to be in the computer, and they will have to come here for the bound volumes, or the case files, and so forth that the computer won't make much difference for those people. I think, generally speaking, the computer age—which was a little late in coming to the National Archives—is now here. I am not sure what the Archives has done the last 15 years, but I am sure they have done more of it.

MR. KABREL: Two major components of the regional archives is having microfilm and outreach. Those two things, at the present time, are both non-existent at this point in Waltham. Do you think we can justify the existence of being regional archives?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, you have all the elite, original records that are still here, or wherever, and they're not going to be online, or microfilmed or anything in the near future. So, we've got lots of records in the backroom, there. Someone's going to have to get them out and take care of them. The outreach part, yeah, I was never a fan of outreach. People who are more comfortable doing it, speaking to groups and so forth—Jim being one of them, but even Walter when he was here, and others—that outreach was done in a number of ways; some major ways and some very minor ways. I think, certainly, it is going to be people who are doing historical work and needing, certainly there's many people who are doing historical work and needing properly cared for and properly described historical records to use. There is no room in Washington. They're still regionalizing records. Is that true, I presume, that records are still coming from Washington?

MR. KABREL: Yes.

MR. TOZESKI: Directly to the Archives?

MR. KABREL: Yes.

MR. TOZESKI: A lot of those records have not been truly processed and described, and so forth. There's work still to be done here, so I would say so. The outreach, that can be done. Diane was really into outreach a lot. And Jim went along with it, to a certain extent. But I kind of just stayed in the back room, where I was happier.

MR. KABREL: What would you say Stan Tozeski's legacy would be here?

MR. TOZESKI: Legacy? Well, legacy is a catchy, catchy word to use. I think my description work, which I enjoyed doing, I think I did a good job on that. So, any of the description and processing of the collections would be up there.

MR. KABREL: If you had to change one thing regarding the National Archives itself, what would you change?

MR. TOZESKI: No, I can't weigh in.

MR. KABREL: What should they do a better job at?

MR. TOZESKI: For people like myself, or the public at home?

MR. KABREL: The National Archives as a whole. What should they be doing a better job at?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, I don't think they should try to compete with some of the other people in some of the same business—your Library of Congress and other—I always got the feeling that the National Archives, sometimes, wanted to get on the bandwagon, which other people were already doing and had been doing for a long time, just to say, "Look, we can do it, too." You know? I guess you can understand some of that, but as long as they realize that this involvement and a lot of stuff wasn't truly in line with the National Archives mission takes time, and staff, and money, and so forth. Maybe, narrowing this scope of activities and to eliminate a lot of the distractions that can come from competition with the other assistance.

The National Archives, is supposed to to have the best qualified people, and most knowledgeable people, and there are a lot of smaller archival activities going on all over the country that could use self-publication, maybe that National Archives could put out, or a workshop they could give someplace, and so on. So, the advisory system's function would remain. I don't know whether it would change anything. 15 years out of the game, I'm not sure what they would be doing for the past 15 years.

MR. KABREL: If you had to do it all over again, what would you change? Would you change anything?

MR. TOZESKI: Career advancement, and so forth? No, I don't think so.

MR. KABREL: Okay. Before we end this interview, two more questions; the next one being, tell us a little bit about your post-NARA career?

MR. TOZESKI: Yeah. That was something that I fell into. One of the West Point people—a librarian at West Point, who also was a rare book appraiser—who was contracted to go to Atlantic Union College up here in Massachusetts. They had a private collection there that they wanted appraised for insurance purposes. They also needed it to be processed. There was a professor there working on the collection, and he had passed away, and they were looking for someone to come in and just take over.

It wasn't a very large collection, but it needed a lot of work. It was a collection that was related to a Dutchman who ran an escape network over in Europe during the war. He had a fast-inning career, just what the History Channel had been looking for, a hired historian. They asked him, when they went to do the appraisal, if he knew any archivists that could clean the collection up, and finish the job that this professor was doing. It was not so much an archives as a manuscript collection, but it was a combination.

Alan Mahon, recommended me. I had to deal with the people, and they said, "You know, we just want someone to come in and clean this up." They had all kinds of big plans for institutes, and so on, and so forth, which kind of went by the wayside after the college closed. But that was an interesting collection with a little bit of everything in it. There were books. There were photographs. There were all kinds of archival-related awards, and artifacts and so forth. I worked there for five years, part-time, just a couple of days a month.

I was able to preserve, arrange, describe, and service their small collection there. This professor was kind of a Schindler guy. He rescued over 1,000 people; Jews who escaped from the Gestapo, they had down allied airmen who were rescued by the underground, and so forth, and they would get them out to Spain, or Switzerland, or Portugal. It was a fascinating story. It ended up at Stanford, in California, because the college ran out of the money; so did the foundation that hired me. Now, the book is being published in Amsterdam in November. They're going to have a big Dutch publisher thing about that, because the guy was Dutch. Anyway, it was a collection that I couldn't get too involved in it, but I knew everything that they wanted done. I could clean, preserve, describe, box, arrange, and I completed part of an inventory for them, and then they just closed the whole shop down.

That was fun. It was not too far from home; 20-mile drive. That was one thing about West Point. You were on a college campus; you had an academic atmosphere. Your clients were cadets, staff members—once in a while, someone from the public—but you could do so much there. As a civilian employee, I was privileged to utilize some of the facilities that were reserved for—everything for the cadets—but civil employees could do some things as well. It was nice being out at a college campus at Atlantic Union, too; same thing going on. Thinking about it, I should have really gone to a college campus, although I did enjoy it here. This has changed quite a bit, incidentally; the building itself has changed in recent years.

MR. KABREL: And additions to it.

MR. TOZESKI: Yeah.

MR. KABREL: Finally, the last question: Is there anything more to add? Any anecdotes that you can recall?

MR. TOZESKI: I was thinking about that. Nothing major. Kind of routine, humdrum affair in the backroom, for the most part. I'm afraid I don't have anything in the way of exciting activities, or discoveries, or—let me look at some of the notes I put down here.

You were asking about membership, and so forth. I did belong to quite a few regional activities, and as an archivist, the Council on an abandoned military post and a company of military historians, Boston Area Archives Troop, and that sort of thing. The Academy actually got me a membership at the Society of American Archivists (SAA). While I was there, I was an SAA member, but it was through the Military Academy. After leaving there, I did not retain my membership.

MR. KABREL: Do you think those memberships helped you in the work that you were able to do?

MR. TOZESKI: Oh, sure. The context alone—and then, of course, you were readily able to tell them what we had, here, especially these military guys. As a result, we got quite a bit of statistics about these guys coming in and using our paper records. So, that was good. It all worked out well. That was a nice social thing as well, because there were these periodic meetings of these groups, that was nice to go to, to kind of show the flag.

MR. KABREL: Did you ever meet any celebrities or important military individuals in your time?

MR. TOZESKI: Well, when I was working at West Point, we went over to the Roosevelt Library for the dedication of their Eleanor Roosevelt wing. That day, Dag Hammarskjöld was there, and Nelson Rockefeller and Marian Anderson. That was the biggest day, with the biggest names. When I was at West Point, also, they were filming a movie, MacArthur, which Gregory Peck, and that was nice. I just missed Barbara Streisand there; "Funny Girl." She was across the river in Cold Spring, but she spent a lot of time at Trophy Point filming that movie, "Funny Girl." There was Jimmy Cagney at West Point. There was the Archbishop. Yeah, there was a lot of show business. A lot of big names at West Point; not so many here.

MR. KABREL: Jimmy Cagney. Wow.

MR. TOZESKI: Yeah. He had an estate up the river from West Point, and he went to speak to the cadets, and I was in the back row, of course. But that was nice. The Yankees and the Mets used to come up to play the Army baseball team. I had to go up there and sit in the grandstand, and watch that. Those were historic events, there, for the Academy. But here, it was really much more business and less bigshots, more or less.

MR. KABREL: It sounds like a very interesting career, Stan. Thank you very much for your interview, and for your time with the National Archives.

MR. TOZESKI: You're quite welcome.



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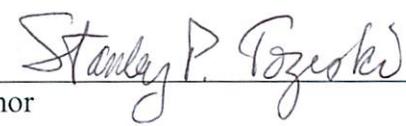
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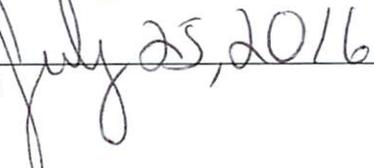
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