Welcome

National Archives and Records Administration offers today’s lecture through the Know Your Records Program

Program begins at 2 p.m. EST
March 11, 2020
Join the conversation!
Participate during the live event.

Online Audience
Log into YouTube and type your questions and comments into the live chat.

On-site Audience
During the question and answer time, please use aisle microphones.
About the National Archives

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the nation's record keeper. Of all documents and materials created in the course of business conducted by the United States Federal government, only 1%–3% are so important for legal or historical reasons that they are kept by us forever.

Those valuable records are preserved and are available to you, whether you want to see if they contain clues about your family’s history, need to prove a veteran’s military service, or are researching an historical topic that interests you.
About the Know Your Records Program

THE KNOW YOUR RECORDS PROGRAM provides information on how to access and do research using U.S. Federal Government records held at the National Archives and Records Administration.

View previous lectures on video at www.archives.gov/calendar/know-your-records
Women during World War II were filling new roles such as Cryptographers or “Code Girls.” These positions were in many branches of the military as well as Federal agencies. Due to varied types of service and last name, locating the "Code Girl" personnel records presents a unique challenge. Reference Archives Specialist Cara Moore Lebonick, takes you through the process of tracking down “Code Girl” personnel records at the National Archives at St. Louis and deciphering what they can reveal!

Ms. Lebonick will broadcast remotely via video from her workplace in St. Louis.
Cara Moore Lebonick is currently a Reference Archives Specialist for the National Archives and has worked with us since 2013. She searches and provides access to individual personnel records of former military and civil servants of the Federal government. Before coming to the National Archives, Cara has worked in a variety of museums and positions. She is also an American Studies Ph.D. student at Saint Louis University studying community building in St. Louis during the New Deal, where she has a Master of Arts in the same field. She has additional degrees from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville including: a Bachelor's Degree in History; a Master's Degree in History; and a Post baccalaureate in Museum Studies.
A female code breaker and member of the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) program operated a Naval Security Station cryptanalytic machine to help decode enemy communications during WWII. (National Archives, RG 457)
“Code Girls” is a somewhat vague descriptor for the various titles and types of employment held by these women. Liza Mundy details many of these variations in her book *Code Girls, The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II*. These variations are well-known by the National Archives at St. Louis staff.

On March 22, 2019, the Library of Congress Veterans History Project hosted five “Code Girls” in a ceremony at their facility.

There have been several other commemorations in recent years about these women who worked diligently to interpret enemy messages. These have lead to an increase in reference requests for “code girl” personnel records and have forced our staff to become intimately knowledgeable on how to find them.

A notice against speaking about job specifics when on leave. (National Archives, RG 64)
Code Girls were employed by a number of different federal agencies and served multiple branches in a military capacity.
A woman’s name change, due to marriage, can make locating a code girl record more difficult.

Notes of a Name Change

RG 146, Department of the Army/Air Force

RG 146, Dept. of the Navy
Example . . . “S. Virginia Dalton”

The Library of Congress Code Girl ceremony write-up included their pictures and scrapbooks. Our staff was able to find one Official Personnel Folder (OPF) -- after following a trail with several twists and turns.

(Photograph courtesy of Kaylah Jackson)
“S. Virginia Dalton”

We began with the employing agency, “War Department”, and her known name at the time of service, Ms. S. Virginia Dalton -- due to the SF50 (pictured left).

However, Dalton married during her time as a federal employee and there was no information in place for a “Ms. S. Virginia Dalton” other than a cross reference that led to Mrs. Virginia D. Yerby!

Staff located the full OPF, but under her married name. We have great scans from Dalton’s record, including her service award letter and application.
Excerpts from Lt. Edythe McDowell’s Coast Guard OMPF

Some code girls worked on the decoding machines and served in the military.

RG 64, U.S. Coast Guard
Because of the increase in the use of punched-card tabulating machines by the Cryptanalytic Section of Communications it has become necessary to provide for an increase in machine operator personnel for that Section and to place the supervision of machine operations under the direction of an experienced person.

Those who served in military branches had less direct titles, as they held rates or rank, as Ensigns and Officers, with speciality duties.

Ensigns who showed an aptitude for code breaking could move up, but first after succeeding in specialized training and sought out.
Valuable Skills

These records corroborate Mundy’s claim -- that these women were commonly picked up from colleges and universities for their technical and language skills.

RG 64, U.S. Coast Guard

RG 24, U.S. Navy

RG 26, U.S. Coast Guard
Training

Women like Suzanne Harpole Embree excelled quickly despite no previous experience in cryptography.

RG 24, U.S. Navy
Post War

Post war, some women held on to their specialized positions, though it was more rare.
William D. Coffee headed an all black group of female cryptographers. One of them was Ethel Just, whose Efficiency Rating is pictured.

Like many civilian employee records, it is difficult to track down these individuals. This is due to no longer existing roster or administrative listing that survived the record schedule to destroy them.
Both civilian federal and military service were rewarded for their actions.
Requesting these records:

OMPF- SF180 submitted via postal mail or through eVetRecs

OPF-Please provide name, maiden name as applicable, date of birth, employing agency, or best guess, as well as location of employment to:

stl.archives@nara.gov or National Archives
Archival Department
1 Archives Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63138

If you believe federal service may have gone beyond 1952, please submit your request in writing with a signature to:

National Personnel Record Center
Civilian Personnel Records Annex
1411 Boulder Blvd
Valmeyer, IL 62295
Questions?

Cara Moore Lebonick
After the live broadcast . . .

Email questions to inquire@nara.gov

Video recording of the lecture will remain online at www.archives.gov/calendar/know-your-records
Feedback

We value your opinion.

Please take a minute to complete a short evaluation. Your comments help us maintain the quality of our services and plan future programs. Thank you!

Event Evaluation:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/KYREventEval