



Army Sustainment Command

News Release

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RELEASE 20100223-XX

February 23, 2010

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Historian's office gets new look

ROCK ISLAND, ILL.—Down in the basement of the Army Sustainment Command headquarters at Rock Island Arsenal, Ill., you will find a small historian office with boxes of documents and archives stacked on the floor and papers scattered on the table in the library.

George Eaton, command historian, has been dealing with the aftermath of several floods last summer that damaged the office and numerous archives.

“A pipe in the wall broke eight times causing the floor to flood,” Eaton said. “Then the air conditioner drain line clogged twice causing water to come thru the ceiling.”

ASC and Joint Munitions Command share the space. The office received thousands of archives from the battlegrounds and from bases that have closed in Europe which caused storage issues.

“We originally used file cabinets to store and keep the files organized,” Eaton said. “However, the office did not have enough space or manpower to keep up with all the archives, so cardboard boxes were stacked on shelves and the floor.

“The flood destroyed less than 10 items. The rest were sent to Amcad [a digital conversion business], located on the Arsenal, which had the room to dry them out,” Eaton said.

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With more than 500,000 pages of documents, photos, DVDs, 16 millimeter film reels and other types of historical archives dating back to World War II, a new shelving system was needed. The flooding made it a priority. The construction and repairs of the pipes, walls, and shelving system were completed a few weeks ago.

The new shelves move back and forth on motorized tracks increasing storage space by about 40 percent. The shelves have solid metal tops to shut out water if a flood was to occur again. All the documents will be placed in acid free boxes to protect them.

With the increase in space, Eaton can remove the documents off the floor and categorize them. So far, Eaton's staff has about half of the archives back in the office and he figures it will take about two months to account for everything.

"Not only did the flood lead to new shelves, but it made it a great opportunity to start to get things digitized," said Eaton. "The new era of archiving is to put them online, instead of having to go thru boxes."

Digitization will reduce the amount of physical space and amount of paper copies required because Eaton's staff will no longer need to store all of the hard copies here. Instead, some of the documents will be sent to the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Md. Eaton said he projects that it will take about six years until everything has been digitized.

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