

Dispatches from the Front: Findings from the Virtual Footlocker Project Phase 1

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Abstract: For generations, soldiers documented their wartime experiences in personal diaries, photographs, and correspondence. Often veterans kept these treasured personal collections long after their service and handed them down to family members with some eventually donated to archives and museums. These personal military service accounts serve a vital role in humanizing wartime sacrifices and experiences. The contemporary 21st-century soldier no longer creates and maintains the same analog personal archives with the shift towards digital technologies over the past twenty years, thereby creating a critical future gap in the record. In its entirety, the Virtual Footlocker Project focuses on the development of an open-source, web-based digital preservation system for capturing and preserving the personal communication methods and documentary record of the modern soldier.

The presentation explores the personal archiving and record-keeping habits of the modern soldier through addressing the following research questions: What types of communication and documentary methods are modern soldiers using? What, if any, methods are modern soldiers using to preserve their service-time archives and records (and to what degree)?

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