

## **Love Me Binders: Personal Information Collections for the Modern Soldier**

**ALLAN A. MARTELL, EDWARD BENOIT, AND GILLIAN BROWNLEE**

The virtual footlocker project (VFP) is a research initiative aimed at understanding and supporting active members and veterans of the US army forces in capturing and preserving their experiences of service. Supported by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the VFP team has conducted 22 focus groups with 99 members of the different branches of the US army forces: the air force, the marine corps, the navy, the coast guard, and the army. Most of our participants served between 2005 and 2020. Based on our findings, our presentation delves into the origins, format, and uses of veterans recordkeeping practices. We place special attention to veterans' personal collections of records known as Love Me Binders. We find that Love Me Binders enable veterans to reminisce about their time of service, ensure their access to benefits such as healthcare, and inherit their memories of service to their descendants. Archivists can play a role in supporting veterans in creating and preserving Love Me Binders. Assisting veterans to preserve their experiences of service represents an opportunity to add nuance and depth to society's understanding of what it means to serve in the US army in the 21st century. Such an intervention is also a means for archivists to demonstrate in a meaningful way their appreciation for veterans' service to the nation.

### **About the authors:**

*Edward Benoit, III* is Associate Director and Associate Professor in the School of Library & Information Science at Louisiana State University. He is the coordinator of the archival studies and cultural heritage resource management programs. He received an MA in History, MLIS and PhD in Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His research focuses on participatory and community archives, non-traditional archival materials and archival education. He is the founder and director of the [Virtual Footlocker Project](#), which examines the personal archiving habits of the 21st century soldier in an effort to develop new digital capture and preservation technologies to support their needs.

*Allan A. Martell* is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Library and Information Science (LIS) where he collaborates with the Virtual Footlocker Project (VFP). He received an MS in Digital Media from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a PhD in Information from the University of Michigan. His research centers on youths' memories of historical episodes of violence such as civil wars, genocides, or dictatorships. In his work, Martell traces the interactions of youths with historical representations of violence in cultural heritage organizations — such as memorials, museum exhibitions and archival records — and how the design decisions around such representations shape these interactions.