

When Historians and Curators Go to War: Capturing History When and Where It Happens

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“History is unfolding before our eyes.” For Army historians and museum professionals this cliché has indeed been apt since 9/11 as America has waged an unrelenting war against terrorism around the globe. This protracted conflict has wrought significant changes in the Army in its organization, equipment, policies, and doctrine. For individuals working in the Army’s history offices and museums, this “long war” has meant documenting these changes as they happen, often from the front lines of the battlefield.

This article stems from the authors’ presentation at the Joint Annual Meeting of the National Council on Public History and the Society for History in the Federal Government, held March 16–19, 2016. The panel explored the challenges involved with capturing history as it is being made and addressed how these collection efforts influence Army educational, training, and leadership programs. The panel members have deployed around the world to such places as Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, Colombia, and Haiti in support of Army operations. That effort is in keeping with the Army’s Military History Program, which emphasizes collection, interpretation, and education.



The Army Transportation Museum at Fort Eustis, Virginia, featured artifacts collected in theater as part of new displays on Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

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Public History the Army Way

The United States Army Center of Military History, located at Fort McNair, Washington DC, is the proponent for the Army's History Program. The Center provides program and policy guidance to over 150 Army historians, oversees the operation of 59 Army museums holding over 500,000 artifacts, and manages an Army artwork collection numbering approximately 15,000 pieces. The effective implementation of the Army History Program is dependent on the active participation of historians and museum professionals in ongoing Army operations.

The extended combat operations conducted by the Army over the last 15 years have resulted in considerable changes in virtually every area of the force's organization, equipment, and policy. Members of the Army history community document these changes and incorporate the diverse materials gleaned in their collection efforts immediately into education programs for soldiers in today's Army. This effort will ensure that the Army's history is accurately captured, and is instrumental in guiding change within the Army.

This article includes three perspectives on how Army historians and museum professionals in the Combined Arms Support Command have approached these challenges.¹ The first perspective discusses the need to collect army materials and artifacts from the war front and some of the practical problems involved. The second explains the incalculable value of firsthand experience that historians gain from touring the battlefield and talking with soldiers. These experiences become invaluable when used in support of the Army historian's responsibility to inform doctrine and to assist Army curators in their interpretation of wartime conditions, events, and policies. The third example traces historians' efforts to represent the results of Army policy changes, as for example through recently revised rules in the battlefield role of women. These select views provide insights into the difficulties that Army historians face as they adapt to the rapidly changing nature of warfare and the evolution of the Army. These perspectives also suggest that as

¹ The U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM) is headquartered at Fort Lee, Virginia. The mission of CASCOM is to train, educate, and grow adaptive sustainment professionals, and to develop and integrate innovative Army and Joint sustainment capabilities, concepts, and doctrine to enable Unified Land Operations. Sustainment encompasses the Army Quartermaster, Transportation, Ordnance, Adjutant General and Finance Branches. CASCOM supports the branch museums for Quartermaster and Ordnance, as well as the Army Women's Museum at Fort Lee, the Army Transportation Museum at Fort Eustis, VA, and the Adjutant General and Finance Museums at Fort Jackson, SC.

military historians adapt their methods and approaches to the changing battlefield and evolving Army, they reveal and redefine their vital role of preserving and interpreting the historical evidence upon which sound policy and doctrinal decisions can be made.

Collect Now, Tomorrow is Too Late

Working in conjunction with Army historians, museum professionals are charged with capturing the history of campaigns through artifacts and exhibits. The benefits of doing so are many, including providing a visual record of our changing Army in times of conflict, ensuring that the proper platforms are available for future research and study, and providing the general public with an outlet to learn about our Army at war while the official histories are still being written. However, collecting from the modern battlefield is far more difficult than in previous conflicts.

The obvious challenge to collecting during ongoing combat operations is the inherent physical risk. It can be very dangerous to deploy into an active combat zone merely to collect pieces for a museum. In past conflicts, this was not required. Forces would deploy, and when the mission was complete, they would come home. Army museum professionals could then study the events, identify critical pieces that should be collected, and then secure those pieces. That was the procedure whether the materials were issued equipment, personal items, or significant artifacts collected on the battlefield by the units themselves. Materials no longer needed by that unit could be transferred or donated to the Army museum. But in the Army's most recent conflicts, most of those critical items did not return with the unit because they remained in theater for use by the next unit rotating in. Today's conflicts have lasted so long that items traditionally identified as historically significant were altered or updated multiple times before returning home. These kinds of issues have forced the museum professionals charged with capturing those three-dimensional historical artifacts to rethink how they go about their business.

The first step in this new thought process was actually convincing others, including superiors, that this collection was necessary. Why do Army historians have to literally enter a combat zone, possibly putting themselves in danger, just to collect artifacts? We can answer this by asking, "Have you ever wished you could go back in time, say to June 1944, and stand next to a soldier or on the beaches of Normandy a few days after the landings and collect those interviews, those documents, those uniforms, and other items that over 70 years of hindsight have revealed as important?"

As discussed earlier, the biggest challenge for collecting is that the items identified as historically significant to the story of the Army at war simply were not coming back home where they could be identified, studied, and collected. Other than individual uniforms and equipment, most of the tools of war were shipped overseas with the first units that deployed. The equipment was then left in theater for use by the succeeding units. This process saved the Army the expense of multiple shipments of the same types of materials. But it rapidly became impossible to track any individual piece of equipment as it moved from one unit to the next while undergoing significant alterations.

Modifications to Army equipment also create problems since these changes were occurring in theater. This issue was further exacerbated by the fact that the Army museum system was no longer directly linked to the research and development (R&D) offices within our force. Prior to the Vietnam War, equipment prototypes that had been tested and accepted by the Army would be turned over to the museum system to help document the developmental history of our force. This relationship ended in the 1970s and has never been reestablished. That means that museums would not be privy to the R&D testing or fielding until such items began to appear on the battlefield.

The final blow to collecting through more traditional methods was the fact that once items were finally determined to be excess to the needs of the fighting force, they were generally turned over to the host country. If they were sent back to the United States, current policies required these pieces to be sterilized prior to shipment. Any and all modifications, either official or unofficial, had to be removed. Additional items added to every combat vehicle such as counter-IED technology, communications equipment, tactical combat systems, or field-modifications to standard equipment were removed from the vehicles. Consequently, any equipment that was made available to the museum system was not an accurate representation of how that piece looked or functioned when in theater.



The modification of Army vehicles in response to the threat of Improvised Explosive Devices was a regular occurrence. Non-standard add-on devices were installed in theater.

There are many arguments for putting a collection team on the ground, and they are generally accepted by most commands. The challenge then became not only identifying the team and getting them into theater, but more critically, identifying what needed to be collected, how it was to be collected, and then arranging for how to get those items sent back. Usually individuals selected to deploy into an active theater were uniformed military personnel. Army Reservists or National Guard soldiers who also worked in the Army Museum System were ideal candidates. When uniformed personnel were not readily available, Department of the Army civilian employees could be and were sent.



The collection of artifacts required the deployment into the combat theater by military history detachments and Army museum system civilian personnel.

Once individuals were identified and all preparations and coordination were completed, the team would develop a comprehensive collection plan. This plan is the most critical document that a team or individual would take with them to complete their mission. In short, a collection plan is a detailed list of what types of

items need to be collected to support the history of an operation. The plan has to take into account several considerations in its development. First and foremost, it needs to match the intended purpose. What story are we trying to tell? That in itself becomes a multifaceted element of the plan that includes looking at the combat history to be documented, as well as the technological history that should be captured. Within those broad categories, the plan needs to consider strategic, tactical, and individual levels when identifying pieces that best represent those areas.

Of course, the real difficulty beyond the ability to collect is also to get the items released from active use and ultimately returned to the United States and accessed into the Army Museum System. It is obviously very challenging to put people into harm's way in order to collect the tools of warfare just so they can be returned to a museum. Would it be prudent to just wait and collect what is available, document what can be documented, and tell the story of our current operations sometime in the future when a collection can be acquired with less inherent risk?

That question is usually framed in the context of a more extended conversation on why it is important to make all of that old stuff in our museums matter. Aside from some great stories and iconic artifacts from our military past that everyone can enjoy, do these pieces really have a tangible role to play in educating our soldiers who are preparing for war? This is an important question because it addresses the very reason why artifacts must be collected now in our current operations. In short, it completes the circle.

Army museums are filled with amazing stories and artifacts of soldiers from previous wars. The museum staff's mission is to introduce the soldiers and stories of the past to today's personnel and show them that this is their history and heritage. This link can be difficult for the current generation of soldiers, who consider Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield (1990–1991) ancient history. The young officers and noncommissioned officers in our force only know our Army at war in the past decade. The stories and artifacts of our current conflicts or actions connect those “ancient” elements to today.

This approach allows soldiers and civilians alike to follow our military history right into today's headlines, drawing that connection of where we came from and how we arrived at our modern-day fighting force. They now see that the developmental timeline that began with the musket and wagon actually did lead to our smart weapons and drones. That young soldier reading about a trooper in World War II can identify with their own experiences in present-day operations and make the connection. They realize that soldiers from past wars are no different than today's soldiers. This is the moment when the museum's storyline becomes their own. The history represented in the galleries is now recognized as their history, their heritage.

It is true that the challenges of collecting during ongoing operations are extremely difficult and potentially hazardous at times. However, when the collection effort is properly coordinated and executed, the risks and challenges are vastly reduced. The reasons for rising to the task can be seen in the execution and implementation phases. To wait is to guarantee that critical pieces are lost to time. Too many significant items never return from the operational theater, or if they do, they return heavily modified from their original configuration, missing the critical information explaining the modification and the reason they were changed for combat. On the other end of the process, it is critical to be able to tell the story of our Armed Forces engaged in the longest conflict in our history. To give relevance to the past, it must be tied to the present.

How Present Lessons Inform Practices

The Army historian is the institutional memory of the unit. In order to benefit the organization, the historian must understand and anticipate the needs of the unit leadership and assist those leaders in using history to inform the decision-making process. There are many ways in which an organizational historian can do this. Specifically, a historian serving in the Army's Training and Doctrine Command is required to educate soldiers, influence doctrinal development, and preserve contemporary history for future generations. The multiplicity of these responsibilities requires the historian to stay abreast of current operations in order to best apply the historic lessons of the past.

In the case of the Army Transportation Corps, this effort to collect materials resulted in significant changes to doctrine and organization. It became important to deploy a historian to Iraq in order to write a history of the war. Interviewing soldiers of the first transportation units returning from the war as well as those passing through the Army Transportation School as students or instructors provided enough knowledge of transportation operations during the war to reveal the volume of what the historian did not know. To write about the convoy operations in Iraq without riding on them along the supply routes would be like writing about the Battle of Gettysburg without ever walking the ground. As a historian for the Army Transportation Corps, Richard Killblane first deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in March 2005 and returned in the four ensuing years. He also deployed twice to Afghanistan for the same purpose soon after convoy operations began there.

The immediate benefit of visiting the theater was demonstrated in the classroom and on staff rides to Civil War battlefields. Killblane could easily relate the contemporary soldier's recent experiences to lessons from the past, such as comparing the development of gun trucks and convoy security in both the Vietnam and Iraq wars. During staff rides of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign, he could make comparisons between the logistical bases in Kuwait and Iraq with those of the Union Army outside Richmond, Virginia. For example, White House Landing was the log base in the manner that Arifjan, Shuyabah, and Kuwait Naval Base in Kuwait, and Savage Station was the Anaconda/Balad logistics center of Iraq. Any logistician who served in that theater easily recognized the base of supply that constituted the center of the "hub and spoke" supply operations. The Army and Air Force Exchange Service trailer had replaced the "sutler" of the Civil War, and the civilian merchants in the Union Army tent city at White House Landing resembled the "Hadji Mart" outside nearly every logistical base established in the current theaters of operation. When the two time periods are juxtaposed in this manner, contem-

porary Army logisticians realize the main differences are the technology and the color of the uniform; the conduct of the logistical operation has remained relatively the same across two centuries. Seeing modern operations firsthand was also beneficial in interpreting the past. This was particularly true of convoy operations.

Experiencing how convoys were conducted in Iraq also helped the historian understand convoy operations in Vietnam. The scene of cargo trucks lined up in rows with the gun trucks parked in groups of twos and threes in the staging areas in Kuwait and Iraq looked very similar to the photos of convoys staged in Vietnam. Little had changed. By better understanding how convoys were conducted in the past, he could better relate the past experiences to the current war.

Riding on convoys in Iraq also helped identify training gaps in the Army program of instruction. The Transportation School had previously taught that convoys were administrative/logistical moves from Point A to Point B. Now, due to ambushes in Iraq, the convoys became combat operations. Killblane subsequently wrote *Circle the Wagons, The History of US Convoy Security*, a volume published by the Army's Combat Studies Institute in 2005, to teach the solutions gleaned from the Vietnam War. He also recognized the need to train convoy commanders to think tactically. To do this, he began to collect first-person convoy ambush accounts from the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan and turn them into tactical case studies. Command Sgt. Maj. Duane Perry, commandant of the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy at Fort Eustis, Virginia, was the first to integrate one of Killblane's case studies into the program of instruction. The effectiveness of the case study as a teaching tool has now garnered Army-wide audiences.

In an exchange of information on lessons of convoy operations, Killblane shared his initial draft of Convoy Ambush Case Studies with the Army Center of Lessons Learned, which felt the information was important enough to publish on its Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) webpage. In 2010, several British publishing companies reprinted the case studies because the information is in the public domain. By war's end, Killblane had collected enough case studies to go to print. Inspired by the *Osprey Campaign Series* and *Veritas* magazine format, he chose to self-publish through the Transportation School.

In 2014 he published *Convoy Ambush Case Studies, Vol. I, Korea and Vietnam*, and *Vol. II, Iraq and Afghanistan* in 2015. Killblane used these as classroom texts to instruct newly commissioned lieutenants in how to use case studies to develop their ability to think tactically. These volumes also preserved the accom-

plishments of the past and told the story of how truck drivers fought during the four conflicts.

Killblane's observations of technological developments and tactics in the combat theater were also distributed to the doctrine and technology developers in the Combined Arms Support Command in the form of trip reports. The National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, also took a keen interest in his research. The ability to extract the lessons of the past are enhanced by exposure to current operations and can have a direct influence on change within an organization.

When a commanding general asked Killblane how to best use a historian, he replied that when solving any problem, ask for the history of the problem dating back to its origins. One should ask, "Why have we done things this way and what has changed?" His research into military railroad operations in the past, and more recently in Iraq,



This Army vehicle has been fitted with armor reinforcement of the crew compartment. Non-standard protective measures such as this were retrofitted to vehicles in theater.

revealed that the Army's rail capability was not adequate. During World War I, the U.S. Army learned that Europe's operational rail capacity was limited, and that if it ever deployed to Europe for another war, it should take its own rolling stock. The Army subsequently created rail operating and shop battalions that deployed during World War II and the Korean War, but never again after that. What history revealed was that if a functioning rail line existed in the theater, the United States Army used the host nation's rail capability. What the Army needed instead of railroad operators

were rail advisers and managers. Consequently, Killblane's paper titled "The Use of Military Rail" led to the restructuring of the Army's last remaining rail operating battalion into the Expeditionary Rail Center. Concurrent with adapting the lessons of the past to the needs of today's Army, the historian has to be the guardian of the unit's institutional memory.

The historian should also be a member of the museum team in efforts to preserve the past and tell the soldiers' story through artifacts. If both the historian and curator

develop a mutual understanding of their respective responsibilities and skills, then their work will be complementary. The Army Transportation Museum staff at Fort Eustis, Virginia, in collaboration with the Transportation historian, developed a plan for the collection of objects and documents from recent conflicts. Thus, both parties benefitted from the other's efforts. One recent example was in the planning of an exhibit specific to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. The historian was consulted in the development of the story line because of his extensive firsthand knowledge gleaned from his many visits to the theaters. His assistance to the curator, who was preparing for a museum collection mission to Kuwait, was invaluable. The huge success of the exhibit was a direct result of their collaboration and the familiarity with current operations gained during deployments.

Effects of War on Policy

When one thinks of military museums, "old" history often comes to mind. One of the challenges in an Army museum is to figure out ways to create exhibits that today's soldiers will find relevant. This has been especially true with younger soldier populations—millennials—and in particular with the fast-changing role of women in the Army. In December 2015, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced that all jobs and positions would be open to women in all military branches. Acting Army Secretary Patrick Murphy stated in February 2016,

This is the right decision for our Army. The personal courage and selfless service made by women in our Army is no different than that exhibited by our men . . . we owe them the respect and honor to offer them the opportunity to succeed anywhere in our Army based upon only the merits of their performance.

There would be no exceptions. As the staff of the U.S. Army Women's Museum at Fort Lee, Virginia, we knew that this policy change would profoundly affect our story line and impact our current interpretation of the events leading up to that point. We decided the only way to ensure that we would produce accurate accounts was to begin immediately collecting those objects and documents relating to women soldiers that would become part of the historical record. We had begun doing that in the recent past. The following three examples demonstrate the process of collecting the history, interpreting its meaning, and creating an exhibit. However, doing this as history unfolds has its challenges and can be perilous.

In 2007 the museum decided to update its gallery and add an exhibit that would reflect the role of Army women in the ongoing conflict in Iraq. After some research, the staff decided to focus on the circumstances surrounding

then Sgt. Lee Ann Hester, the first woman to be awarded the Silver Star for direct combat action. The curators began by collecting as much as they could about the events that led to that award. This included material from the 10 soldiers of Raven 4-2 (the squad's radio call sign), after action reviews, unedited film taken from the enemy at the time of the battle, and firsthand accounts of how the events unfolded.

The museum director spent considerable time determining how to interpret the story. When Sergeant Hester was approached about creating the exhibit, she was adamant that the entire Raven 4-2 team be represented. She stated that “this is not about me being a woman, rather about being a Soldier.” Such selflessness is not uncommon with modern-day female soldiers. The staff knew that for this exhibit they would not only need to abide by her wishes (she said she would not participate in its creation if they did not include her team) but that, in fact, it would become an important point in the interpretation. Of the four panels in front of the display, only one is specific to Sergeant Hester. The medals case to the right of the exhibit contains photos of all 10 squad members with their medals awarded for that day's battle. When this exhibit was created in 2007 in the middle of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, the staff certainly could not foresee all the policy changes that would follow.

FEMALE SOLDIERS

BECOME A PART OF HISTORY

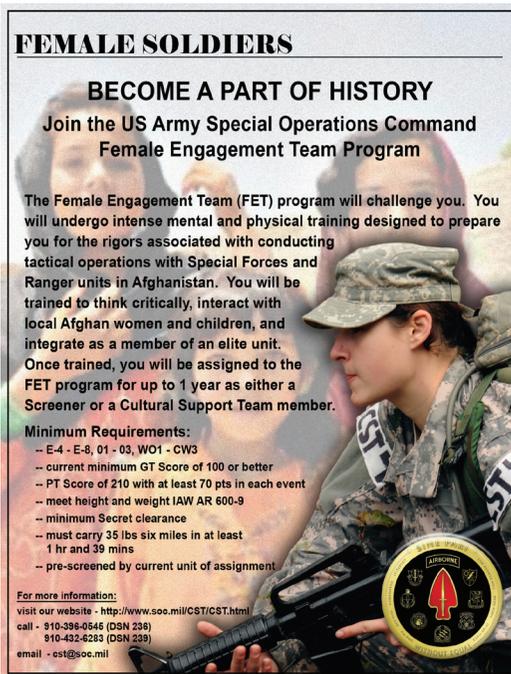
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Cultural Support Teams/ Female Engagement Teams

A poster titled “Female Soldiers” came to the Army Women’s Museum in 2008 via email from an Army soldier serving in Afghanistan. He was familiar with the museum’s collection efforts and thought the curators would find the poster interesting. Little did everyone

Recruiting poster for the Army’s Female Engagement Team program. The development of teams of female soldiers was an effective way to interact with the women in the local population in the predominantly Muslim cultures.

know the implications of what the poster announced: “Female Soldiers: Become a Part of History. Join the US Army Special Operations Command Female Engagement Team Program.” This was a prescient moment, and the staff knew that they needed to collect as much as they could about the Female Engagement Teams (FETs). In 2010 Special Operations Command created a unique training program for Army women who were chosen to work as part of Cultural Support Teams (CSTs).

It took many months of deliberation, collaboration, and research to decide how the work of women in this unique assignment should be interpreted.

The staff finally decided that a large, impactful photograph with a soldier addressing an Afghan woman would suffice. However, there are some pitfalls in putting together an exhibit without full knowledge of the subject. During development of the exhibit, an officer attending a course at Fort Lee commented that the planning had neglected to acknowledge the work of women who preceded the FETs and CSTs, specifically the work of women on Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and in the Military Police. Their contributions over the last dozen years were indeed significant, as the staff discovered in the course of conducting greater research. After a second significant collection effort, historians were able to gather oral histories that enabled the inclusion of those missions in the interpretive signage.

Our Female Warrior Statue: First Lieutenant Fawma

With so many changes taking place concerning the role of women in the Army, the museum staff looked for a way to tell visitors that the museum represents not only the history of the past, but also stories about the present. They decided that a statue representing a modern female soldier helps communicate the ongoing collection and interpretation efforts.



Top: Members of a Cultural Support Team operating somewhere in Afghanistan (2012). Above: The final exhibit resulting from the research and interpretation.



Top left: Sgt. 1st Class Sherri Williams modeling potential poses and equipment for the figure. Top right: The statue on the day of its unveiling in 2014. Above: Historical reenactors, who themselves are currently serving, and present-day soldiers posing in front of their warrior.

The statue, part of an outdoor exhibit at the U.S. Army Women's Museum, pays tribute to the women who have served in the Army for the past two decades. The museum staff envisioned a full-size figure that would draw attention to the contributions of the modern Army female warrior. Of course the main questions were what should she look like, what should she be wearing, and how can the statue

represent as many Army women as possible? The project needed to achieve a fully representational symbol, and so required a great deal of care and thought. The staff decided on the following description:

The statue is a First Lieutenant (1LT). Her name is “FAWMA” (which is the acronym for Friends of the Army Women’s Museum Association). The 1LT will have served in the Army for 3–6 years . . . she would have entered service in the post–9/11 period. She is youthful; she reflects the energy of a young soldier. Because of her rank she exudes the confidence of a leader, but also has much to learn. It is the Non-commissioned officer (NCO) who will teach her what she needs to know, as will the Warrant Officers she serves with. Field Grade Commissioned Officers will mentor her.

She is wearing equipment that soldiers use while in a field training environment or while deployed. She has combat gear such as a rucksack, a water hydration system, helmet and protective vest.

Her patches represent the service of the Active Army and our citizen-soldiers—Reserve and Guard. The patches indicate that she served a combat tour with the 1st Infantry Division and is currently assigned to the 94th Training Division (FS). [The 94th Infantry Division was activated in 1942 in Michigan. In 1967 it was re-designated the 94th Army Reserve Command.]

Sgt. 1st Class Sherri Williams, the Fort Lee equal opportunity officer, first modeled for the statue with the equipment she wore in her last deployment to Iraq. The team carefully examined photographs of the model. It was absolutely critical to ensure that she was portrayed as accurately as possible and that staff could explain why they chose the name, rank, patches, and other identifications. The CASCOM Command Sergeant Major and several other senior noncommissioned officers inspected her uniform and equipment to ensure that she was properly attired. An officer and NCO from Fort Hamilton, New York, with the assistance of the Fort Hamilton museum curator, visited the artist who was creating the statue.

The museum staff is proud of the work that went into creating this outdoor exhibit. They periodically receive questions about why they chose a certain type of uniform, or didn’t include an object, such as sunglasses. Nevertheless, they know that this statue soon will become—literally and figuratively—history. They con-

tinue to collect, interpret, and write about Army women's history. It is a challenge, especially when resources are difficult to come by, but they know that future historians and museum staff will appreciate the efforts.

Collect Now for the Future

For the history professionals who support today's Army, an active, integrated program of collection, interpretation, and education is of paramount importance. History is incorporated into all levels of instruction. History is part of classroom presentations that detail the story of the Army and its heritage, during staff rides on American and foreign battlefields that reinforce the timeless principles of leadership, and through displays in the Army's museums that put the public in touch with the past. In order to make this relevant, history as taught and displayed must be able to combine significant elements of the past with contemporary examples that provide useful connections and insights for today's Army men and women. This article explores the unique issues and demands facing the history community in the modern Army in the areas of research and artifact collection. The challenge of making history useful and impactful is not unique to the Army, but is one faced in all government organizations now undergoing rapid and fundamental change. The issues confronted by Army historians and their approaches to solving these problems provide valuable lessons for all federal historians.

Picture credits: Museum exhibit, CONUS vs Theater, U.S. Army Transportation Museum; Army personnel image, David Hanselman; large Army vehicle, Richard E. Killblane; female soldiers poster, Cultural Support Team and exhibit, Sgt. Williams, statue, and women soldiers, U.S. Army Women's Museum.

