TEACHING WITH ON-LINE PRIMARY SOURCES: ELECTRONIC DATA FILES FROM NARA

HOLLYWOOD ACTORS' PARTICIPATION IN WORLD WAR II

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Which famous country-western singer and movie start, first name Orvon, served with the U.S. Army Air Forces Transport Command during World War II? Which former child star and costar of the "Andy Hardy" series enlisted in 1944?[1] The answers to these questions may be found, in part, by searching the U.S. Army Serial Number Electronic Merged File and the World War II Prisoner of War File, now available at the National Archives and Records Administration's Access to Archival Databases websites. These and many other servicemen's enlistment and/or prisoner-of-war information await discovery by students and teachers.

Part I: About AAD

Inquiry or discovery teaching methods traditionally employ paper documents as their primary source material. Photographs, diagrams, and textual sources often are favored over the use of electronic files or databases, despite increased accessibility via the Internet. Though introduced in the 1980s by Richard Ennals as a more dynamic way for students to develop problem-solving skills in social studies, data files are not widely used by teachers. This is unfortunate because data files may be searched by querying the database to discover possible sources of pattern fluctuations. Patterns may be explored for contributing factors to an observed phenomenon, and the results can be graphed and printed. Databases or files offer a convenient way to collect and summarize large amounts of information in ways that can be searched, sorted, tabulated, and analyzed by a computer.

Information, for example, may be collected by a survey, such as the ones conducted every ten years by the Bureau of the Census. During World War II information was collected from U.S. Army enlistees at the time of enlistment. Records of U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) were created from prisoner lists compiled by the Axis powers and forwarded to the Provost Marshal General's Office through the International Red Cross in Berne, Switzerland.

To search through these mountains of paper would have been too time-consuming for the U.S. Army personnel who notified next of kin or prepared monthly unit strength reports for the Army Chiefs of Staff. So, wherever possible, the information was summarized in the form of codes that could be punched into the appropriate fields of an IBM punch card. (Show sample card in Theodore Hull's article and/or make printed

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[1] **Answers to Opening Questions:** The "Singing Cowboy" was better known as Gene Autry. Child star Mickey Rooney enlisted in 1944 as a private.

copies available.) Of course, punch cards are no longer used, but data is still recorded in columns and rows that form a grid. For example, each column of the Army Serial Number Electronic Merged File bears a title, such as Service or Serial Number, Home State of Record, or Civilian Occupation. These columns separate each row, or the enlistee's record, into fields. Information about each U.S. Army enlistee was recorded on long forms at each induction center. A field, such as State, might be punched with the code "91" for California. A motion picture actor's civilian occupation was encoded as "002." The codes were taken from code books such as "Civilian Occupation Codes." Also layouts provided "maps" to the sequence order of the fields on the punch cards, their size (number of characters), and types (alphabetical or numeric data). Using punch cards and code books helped reduce the time it took to find information about individual U.S. Army enlistees. If these servicemen were killed or captured, their cards could be retrieved in order to locate and notify family members. World War II POW card information was used to analyze the current balance between authorized and actual unit strength of combat units. This information, in turn, was vital in determining which units required reinforcement, which kinds of specialization were required, and how many more personnel needed to be drafted.

What follows is an introduction to a large collection of databases available from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at http://aad.archives.gov/aad/. One of these data files has been selected for illustrative purposes to show how databases might be used in an inquiry or discovery lesson.

Access to Archival Databases (AAD) provides Internet access to 491 databases spanning a period from the Irish Famine to the present. Students can access records that identify specific persons, geographic areas, events, activities, organizations, messages, as well as indexes to other records. Records in AAD include but are not limited to:

- An index and photographs relating to disasters and emergency management
- Files from the Natural Landmarks System
- Grants and contracts that the Federal Government has awarded
- Immigrants through New York City during the Great Irish Famine
- Individual military casualties from the Korean and Vietnam Wars
- Insider trading in securities
- IRS Private Foundations files
- Japanese Americans interned during World War II
- Labor unions in the United States
- Military operations during the Vietnam War
- People processed through the Gorgas Hospital Mortuary in Panama
- Prisoners of War from World War II through the Vietnam War
- Savings and loans or thrift institutions
- Telegrams from the Department of State's Central Foreign Policy File, 1973-74
- The historical significance of major Civil War battlefields

● World War II Army enlistment records, including the Women's Army Auxiliary

The AAD system does not support quantitative calculations or tabulations (e.g., mean, mode, standard deviation, multiple regression analysis, or even basic arithmetic). It is possible, however, to download up to 1000 full records into a spreadsheet (in either raw data form or in interpreted form) for further analysis.

AAD offers both free-text and field-based searches. Free-text search matches strings of text with those found in pages of text and retrieves any page containing one or more of the words found in the string. While useful in searching for text in scanned or otherwise produced paper documents, free-text search ignores context and lacks the rigorous structure of field-based search ordinarily used for searching a database. Free-text search was designed to search collections of documents for pages containing selected keywords or strings of words. For example, scroll down the AAD page, click on "Browse by Category" and then enter "BUSH GEORGE W" in the query box and run the query. This query will retrieve records from the Securities and Exchange Commission, Ownership Reporting System (ORS), having those words in the "Name of Filer" field. Similarly, records will be retrieved from the SEC's Proposed Sale of Securities file, because all three terms occur in the "Name of Seller" field. Free-text search seems to work well where there are name fields. Since this method of search ignores field names, database records are treated as textual documents, leading to retrieval of records having no relationship to the subject. Like many "key word" type searches, this query also retrieved records from the Federal Procurement Data System, FY 1995, because the "Contracting Office City" field was "Fort George G. Meade," the "Contractor Name" contained a "W," and the "Contractor Street Address" was "2 Bush Chapel RD." Free-text searches are easier to run but erratic in their results.

Field-based query is available and encouraged as it forces students to look at specific fields and code values to be used in constructing searches. Each query should be carefully thought through and recorded together with the results produced by the search. These results can lead to further discussion of how to refine or replace the query.

Part II: Using AAD
Teachers might want to refer to http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/toc.html for student standards such as Chronological Thinking; Historical Comprehension; Historical Analysis and Interpretation; Historical Research Capabilities; Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making; and Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945) that are applicable for this teaching activity.

Background
For this activity, supply students with some historical background of Hollywood stars during World War II from a text such as Roy Hoopes, *When the Stars Went to*

War: Hollywood and World War II (New York: Random House, 1995). Note that some well-known actors served while making training films in Hollywood. Some, such as Lew Ayres, a conscientious objector, served with medical units or in other non-combatant capacities. Others, including Errol Flynn, were deferred for medical reasons (tuberculosis scars on his lungs).

Introduction to World War II U.S. Army Serial Number Electronic Merged File

Explain to students that this activity involves searching an actual NARA World War II database containing records of U.S. Army enlistees (no officers). Using the World War II U.S. Army Serial Number Electronic Merged File (ASNF) with AAD, teachers can help their class construct a search query to find out whether actors enlisted during the Second World War.

Objectives

The objective is to introduce databases and research methodology using the World War II U.S. Army Serial Number Electronic Merged File, by asking "Did motion picture actors receive any special treatment during World War II?" (Another method is to let students view some sample records or graphs and then generate their own questions and hypotheses for testing. For example, if students were asked to look at a graph of the numbers of U.S. POWs taken in Europe, they would see a "spike" in the numbers for mid to late December 1944. Ask why this might have happened and then construct a search of the data to determine when and where these losses occurred and why.) Hand out or display sample copies of the records of Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart. Ask students to brainstorm and write down what results they would expect to find after querying the database. For this activity, students should have access to a computer laboratory with Internet access and a facilitator. For large classes, the lesson could be conducted using Smart Screen or some other projective system.

Procedure:

1. Demonstrate for students the layout/search template (list of fields available on screen). To see all fields available for searching, click on "More" in the upper right section of the template. Ask what fields need to be used for the search query. Explain how each field contributes to focusing the search and finding an answer. Look at attached (VIEW) code lists suggested by the class. Encourage students to ask questions such as: Which code(s) should be selected? Or does a suggested field and code narrow the search and help to find an answer? Double-click on the box to produce a check mark and then scroll down and click SUBMIT. This places value in the search template field blank. Follow this procedure until students have exhausted all possibilities or they are ready to run search (click SEARCH). Examine the sample records for Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart for field values associated with finding them, other than by name.

2. Download results for further analysis or record results (frequencies) on the board. Ask students if the results provided answers to the central question concerning favored treatment for actors during their enlistment in World War II. Do the results raise further questions for additional searches and analysis? Encourage additional questions and qualifications concerning results.

3. Ask students what bearing the query results have on their question(s). Have the findings affected their view of the problem? What fields or codes might need to be changed, added, or removed from the query? Follow with further discussion and analysis of findings as they relate to the basic question and any others that students raised. When concluding the session, ask students where they might look for additional sources of information and the types of records that might confirm or strengthen their conclusions.

This sample lesson hopefully will serve as a prototype for others sharing the same purpose of introducing students to databases and social science inquiry methodology. Teachers might wish to refer to Richard Ennals' book, *Beginning Micro-Prolog* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1984), for other suggestions in how such experiences might be planned.

For more information about the World War II Army Serial Number Merged File, go to www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/aad-ww2.html to see Theodore Hull's "The World War II Army Enlistment Records File and Access to Archival Databases (AAD)." It contains a copy of an enlistment card that may be printed and enlarged. For further information about the World War II POW Data File codes and how the information was used to win the war, see Lee A. Gladwin, "TOP SECRET: Recovering and Breaking the U.S. Army and Army Air Force Order of Battle Codes, 1941-1945," in the Fall 2000 issue of *Prologue*.

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