

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Case Support

Background

The Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) in Washington DC serves as the DoD executive agent for matters pertaining to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) claims and Agent Orange research and in support of individual veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and veterans' service organizations. Since 1980, this organization has been responding to veteran claims and initiatives. This includes the development and maintenance of the DoD Persian Gulf Registry, a database that contains the names of 758,000 personnel and over 900,000 daily locations of units that these personnel served in while in the Persian Gulf. The JSRRC is recognized as the combat unit operational records experts for the US Army. It receives an increasing number of veteran and VA claims per year and is responsible for researching PTSD claims for the Army, Air Force, Navy and Coast guard. Information related to PTSD, Agent Orange and the Persian Gulf has high US Congressional interest and visibility.

The Records Management and Declassification Agency (RMDA), is part of the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army. The RMDA provides oversight and program management for the Army's Records Management Program along with establishing programs for records collection, and operating and sustaining the Army Electronic Archive. The RMDA also develops policy, establishes procedures and standards, and provides program management and oversight for Army Correspondence, Official Mail, Rulemaking, Abbreviations, Brevity Codes and Acronyms, Office Symbols, Management Information Control System, and performs HQDA Records Administrator duties. This includes programs for records collection and preservation from garrison, training, contingency and war time operations. The RMDA operates and sustains the Army Electronic Archive and provides the means to identify, collect, index and retrieve important Army records in hard copy and electronic media. The RMDA's information infrastructure supports the research efforts of the JSRRC.

The Challenge

Specific files of nearly all of the data collected over a period of many years of war operations may be needed to support any of the PTSD researcher's case research and development. To this day, the electronic information making up the broad source and range of Army records makes its way to many different data repositories – in many different formats. The formats ranged from simple tif images with associated metadata to complex, nested message & emails, office document and zip files. The repositories range from simple file systems to data bases spread over a range of access methods. To add to the complexity, the data includes both classified and unclassified information. In some instances, case researchers had to physically travel to different locations to access different data repositories housing the information necessary in their investigations. While monetary costs associated with the personnel inefficiencies in the process are obvious, the response time to provide the correct information supporting PTSD case research was unacceptable. This was compounded by the increased number and case load associated with Veterans returning from current war operations.

What is PTSD?

After the Vietnam conflict, a large number of American combatants began to experience a serious psychological disorder characterized by severe flashbacks, recurring nightmares, panic and depression, emotional numbness and sometimes-violent behavior. The American Psychiatric Association named the Vietnam veteran disease, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In previous wars the disorder had other names such as "shell shock" in World War I; "battle fatigue" in World War II; and "operational exhaustion" in the Korea War.

When a veteran witnesses a traumatic event and is reliving that event over and over, they could be suffering from what is called PTSD. The veteran may be eligible for disability compensation, through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). When the veteran files a claim with the VA, that information is sent to the JSRRC to initiate research in an effort to document the stressing event.

The Solution

The RMDA needed a solution enabling the PTSD researcher to search and find specific information while avoiding the complexity and expense of reformatting and reorganizing the vast volume, broad range of format and unstructured nature of the source data. Based in The Woodlands, Texas, COMPU-DATA International, LLC (CDI) delivers products, consulting & professional services, software development and system integration specialized in Enterprise Content Management, Information Organization & Access, and Business Process Management. Since 1988, CDI has been involved in the development and implementation of solutions providing the foundations of digital asset capture, management & retrieval and their integration into the business processes in enterprise throughout the Americas.

CDI's lead ECM product, DigitalAsset Finder™ (DAF), was selected and has been implemented by the RMDA to support PTSD research. DAF, a Commercial off the Shelf (COTS) product integrates content search and digital asset administration into one complete solution providing scalable search, automatic classification and collaboration with extremely large volumes of unstructured data. DAF provides the RMDA with the ability to index millions of records making up many terabytes of data that may reside locally or dispersed over the DoD network. Using DAF, the RMDA has indexed over 10 TB of raw data including 4 million unclassified records of metadata sets, electronic office files and associated scanned images. It is preparing to index the first data set of over 20 TB of classified research data.

From a process perspective, tape-based war operations data is loaded into temporary disk storage then reviewed for metadata identification and access control determination. The raw data is then preprocessed and loaded into repositories where the documents are indexed, automatically classified and may be automatically cataloged into prepared hierarchies.

Because DAF supports over 200 file formats, research data is kept in its original form and format. The often complex relationships of emails with nested attachments, zip files or containerized PDF's are indexed and keep with their original association.

Through its standard web interface and highly scalable search architecture, DAF provides researchers the ability to search and quickly find the case related data they need on a needs-to-know basis within a distributed server environment. Researchers use DAF to retrieve records based on file content where content exists and/or metadata related to the file. Researchers share information and collaborate on cases using personal or public collections. Using DAF the researchers are able to generate PDF files of any viewable file in the system. With DAF, researchers are able to *contribute* information to the document for future use without changing the record and to define *collections* of associated digital assets supporting each case's requirements. Collections representing common themes can be saved and shared with other researchers.



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