



MINISTERIO
DE DEFENSA

SECRETARÍA
GENERAL
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CENTRO DE
PUBLICACIONES

El Sistema Archivístico de la Defensa

The Spanish Military Archive System

THE SPANISH MILITARY ARCHIVE SYSTEM

From the second half of the XIX century the Spanish armed forces have had their own archival systems, including the ensemble of bodies, facilities, administrative services and human and material resources that made possible the keeping of military records from their creation to their final disposal, or their permanent preservation in an archive repository.

After the creation, in 1977, of a unique Ministry of Defence it became necessary to integrate of all those structures into a single archival system adapted to the general legislation on historical heritage arisen after the 1978 Spanish Constitution, as well as conforming to modern archival concepts. The challenge consisted in creating an integral system for the military archives and in transforming them, not only into fundamental organs for the military Administration itself, but also into centres open to the citizens -who may need them as an evidence of their rights- as well as to researchers interested in studying the past of our armed forces.

The Regulations approved by Royal Decree of 4th December 1998 have been the legal instrument to give an answer to these necessities. After their approval, an entire set of actions has been instrumental in the fulfilment of the fixed objectives.

The Spanish Military Archive System is made up of 1) the Ministry of Defence management bodies responsible for the development of rules and common criteria as well as for the planning and co-ordination of the military archives; 2) the advisory bodies, which are the Military Archives Board and the Ministry of Defence Commission for Record Disposition and Access; 3) four subordinate archive subsystems: archive subsystem for the Army, archive subsystem for the Navy, archive subsystem for the Air Force and archive subsystem for the Central body, which covers all the bodies dependent on the Ministry of Defence which are not included in the previous subsystems.

All of the above are responsible for the integral record-keeping of military holdings along their life-cycle, from their creation or accumulation by the different agencies to their final transfer to a historical repository or to their destruction if they have been scheduled as not having enduring value.

The Regulations define four types of repositories according to the records life-cycle: creating agency current files (archivo de gestión); agency record centre (archivo central); record centre (archivo intermedio) and historical archives (archivo histórico).

The Regulations draw up the basic criteria to which the technical guidelines concerning the physical care of the holdings, their arrangement, description and dissemination must conform.

The Regulations also make provisions for a controlled destruction of records, establishing the necessary mechanisms to avoid disposals of records which might have historical value or be evidence of rights and/or obligations of persons or public bodies. In this respect, the key role is assigned to the Ministry of Defense Commission for Record Disposition and Access, which is the body that rules upon questions regarding retention periods and access to military records.

The citizen's rights are specially contemplated in the Regulations as a manifestation of the right of access to culture and to information. The conception of the military archives as constituent elements of the Spanish documentary heritage, guarantees access to military historical repositories and to research on their holdings. The issue of researcher's cards and of temporary research authorisations in military archives is also dealt with by homologating the norms for their issuing with those of State Archives depending on the Ministry of Culture.

The Regulations also refer to access to records held in record centres which correspond to already completed procedures and that are not in the list of record series excluded from public access for reasons of State security, defence of honour, privacy and image of individuals.

Finally, the Regulations deal with the functional and personnel structure of Military repositories by setting up the basic organization of the records centres and the historical archives, whose structure can summarily be represented by the presence of a director, a technical director and auxiliary and subordinate staff.

The Royal Decree which approved the Regulations on the Military Archives expressly declared to be National Archives the following:

- The General Military Archive of Segovia.
- The General Military Archive of Madrid (new title of the Agency records Centre of the Military History Service).
- The General Military Archive of Guadalajara.
- The General Military Archive of Ávila.
- The Map Archive and Geography Archive of the Army's Geography Service.
- The "Álvaro de Bazán". General Archive of the Navy.
- The Naval Museum Archive.
- The Historical Archive of the Air Force.