

BRIDGING AMERICA'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: THE IMAGES OF FREEDOM ARCHIVE

Imagine having more than seven-decades of America's military visual history at your fingertips. From images of battlefield exercises in Kuwait, to World War II videos and decades-old training and operations stills, these are the moments housed and preserved by the Defense Imagery Management Operations Center (DIMOC).

DIMOC, which is part of the Defense Media Activity, is the official records center, or archive, for the United States military's most treasured and irreplaceable video, audio and still imagery. With content dating back to before World War II, the expansive collection consists of more than one million unclassified Department of Defense (DoD) assets. Until now, these iconic moments were mostly inaccessible to the American people DIMOC is chartered to serve.

For years, DIMOC was challenged by how to make these materials available. These assets belong to the American people and provide powerful context on the evolution of our nation's military. But, the project to digitize, archive and expose the archive was massive. It wasn't until DIMOC solicited a contract awarded to Wazee Digital that a strategic, cost-effective, and end-to-end plan was put in place to bring the Images of Freedom web archive to life and to the public.

BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE

The Images of Freedom archive (www.imagesoffreedom.com) is an online service that allows anyone to access the powerful catalog of content managed by the U.S. Department of Defense. The portal allows members of the public—from students and educational institutions, to families of military personnel, to members of the media—to easily search, browse and download previously unavailable, often never-before-seen images from our military's history at home and overseas.

Made possible in partnership with Wazee Digital, the Images of Freedom archive brings DIMOC's mission to life by not only preserving America's visual history for generations to come, but making this history accessible.

Like most major projects, this one was rife with scale and logistical problems that required time, attention and diligence to resolve. DIMOC had been working on a digitization effort for years with limited success. Confronted with a rapidly deteriorating archive due to heat damage, dirt, and storage constraints, they needed to act quickly or risk losing these assets forever. DIMOC also had to



U.S. Soldiers board a U.S. Navy R6D-1 Liftmaster aircraft in the 1950s

deal with a diverse array of physical media assets, including fragile decades-old film, VHS, Beta tapes, and other legacy formats.

DIMOC needed a solution that enabled them to seamlessly aggregate, preserve, digitize and archive the content from all over the world. Once digitized, the content needed to be made easily accessible to the public, as well as to internal DoD users.

FROM THE FRONTLINES TO THE WORLD STAGE IN DAYS

The Images of Freedom archive houses original artifacts, such as combat camera footage from Iraq and Afghanistan, and photographs of personnel and military equipment. Eventually, it will include World War II audio files and instructional military videos. The library is also constantly growing and evolving with the addition of almost 800 new assets daily. The total archive is expected to surpass three million assets by 2018, many of these from military activities taking place just days earlier. These newly digitized and metadata-enriched assets are fed daily to the Wazee Digital platform that powers the archive.



22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit in the first major U.S./Kuwaiti combined service exercise since the end of Operation Desert Storm.

Under the guidance of and in close collaboration with Wazee Digital experts, the team developed an end-to-end process to enable large-scale digitization, storage, and asset preservation, while being flexible enough to capture current event content as it happened.

DIMOC first entrusts its media managers and archivists to assess and curate each asset it receives. The curation process is diligently handled with deep reverence for the nation's history, and with knowledge that every asset reflects a piece of that history at risk of being lost.

Then, to achieve its vision of putting these assets within public reach, each asset moves through a robust process to enrich metadata to enable asset discovery. "Even if you digitize the asset, it doesn't get us anywhere if people can't find it. Discovery is the other half of that equation," says Colonel Koelsch.

Most of the metadata team possess deep military and historical knowledge, often able to recognize the technical nuances of the content subject matter. The team conducts additional research to identify individuals, and provide comprehensive historical context in order to complete the metadata capture process. All of this data then becomes seamlessly searchable through the Images of Freedom portal, built on Wazee Digital's Core platform via

*"Someday, someone's
great-great-grandson will
come across a piece of film
in the images of freedom
archive—and they may have
never had the opportunity
to see that before."*

- U.S. Army Col. Bernard Koelsch,
director of Defense Visual Information

Application Program Interfaces (APIs). In the near future, all digital assets will be analyzed by the Wazee Digital platform for automated metadata extraction to further enrich associated metadata and ease of discovery.

BRIDGING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

At its essence, the Images of Freedom project, powered by Wazee Digital, aims to protect and preserve America's legacy for generations to come. Until now, these rare images were virtually inaccessible to the public. Now, these assets can be viewed and downloaded easily. "The Images of Freedom archive puts a human face on what the U.S. military has done. When we talk about these generational stories of people who are in service to the nation, it's one way we can show that to the public," says U.S. Army Col. Bernard Koelsch, director of Defense Visual Information.

With Wazee Digital, DIMOC was able to define the right approach, tools and techniques to execute its global archival vision, bridging the past, present and future of America's military visual history.



For more information about Wazee Digital, please visit
www.wazeedigital.com