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Federal Military Branch

Ricoh helps a military branch reduce costs and offload FOIA request fulfillment.

The branch's records and other documents were stored on paper in the state repository and it was a challenge to retrieve any hard copy records.

ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

This military branch on the West Coast is comprised of nearly 20,000 citizen soldiers who serve their state when local emergencies arrive, and serve their country when deployed to foreign lands. Like its counterparts in other states, the branch needs to fulfill Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests in a timely manner as well as contend with the looming 2020 deadline to provide all records digitally for a national archive.

CHALLENGE

- Inability to quickly access paper-based service member records
- Inefficient FOIA response process
- High monthly offsite storage costs
- Looming 2020 deadline to digitize records

This military branch was inundated with FOIA requests, mostly from families that wanted personnel records on their deceased loved ones who had served. But since all records were still on paper and housed at an offsite state repository, it took between two weeks to two months to produce the information.

This delay not only flew in the face of military guidelines for timely response to FOIA requests, it also fell far short of internal standards for providing attentive service to soldiers and their families. Plus, the storing of paper records offsite was very costly to the military.

Then, there was the National Archive and Records Administration's (NARA) directive that all records must be provided digitally to its organization by 2020. With that deadline looming and its inefficient FOIA response process, the branch needed to implement a process for digitizing records. It issued an RFP to find the right vendor for both backfile and day-forward scanning — a partner that could meet its high security standard for chain of custody.

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RESULTS

- 200,000 legacy paper records digitized
- Monthly storage costs eliminated
- FOIA requests offloaded to NARA
- Family members receive records faster

All totaled, we imaged just under 200,000 legacy paper personnel records for the branch, which translates to approximately eight million pages. Not only did this eliminate the branch's monthly costs to store paper documents with the state, it takes the branch out of the business of managing physical military records altogether.

Military personnel records are now provided digitally to NARA, which has an established, streamlined process for FOIA request fulfillment. Now, when the family of deceased service members request a personnel file, they have the documents they need in hand faster.

Furthermore, given the natural turnover in the military, the branch doesn't have to wait for someone to be retrained on fulfilling FOIA requests when a subject matter expert leaves or gets promoted. Offloading FOIA request fulfillment to NARA eliminates these turnover challenges.

> When family members filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to get records for a deceased service member, turnaround time to fulfill that request could be two weeks to two months.

HOW WE DID IT

- Digitized 100 years worth of records
- Followed strict chain of custody protocols
- Provided DVDs for uploading records to IPERMS
- Digitized additional damaged records

We had provided a number of MFPs to the branch across its statewide locations and made inroads with the branch's IT group and administrative services team. When we learned about the branch's challenges in records administration and other document related processes, we knew we could help. The project called for digitizing all of its legacy paper records — some records dating back more than 100 years.

Once we were awarded the project, we brought the military's paper records to one of our offsite Business Information Solutions (BIS) centers, then scanned and indexed all of the legacy personnel records. We followed strict chain of custody protocols while the original paper documents were in transit or in our care. After digitizing the documents, we provided the branch with DVDs of the data to upload into its IPERMS content management system along with a backup electronic copy for NARA.

The initial digitization project took 4.5 months to complete. However, at the end of the project, more legacy documents were discovered that had sustained fire and water damage. Having earned the confidence of the branch during the first records digitization engagement, decision-makers had us proceed with digitizing these documents as well.

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