

**The Historical Records  
of the  
Office of Naval Research  
A Guide for Researchers**

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ONR Historian



Office of Naval Research

Arlington, VA

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## INTRODUCTION

The Office of Naval Research was established by act of Congress, Public Law 588, as the U.S. government's first permanent agency devoted to funding civilian scientific research during peacetime. This guide is meant as an introduction for researchers seeking public documents and records about ONR, its activities, and the science and technology research that it funds and manages.

## THE OFFICE OF NAVAL RESEARCH

ONR manages and funds basic and applied science and advanced technology development through the use of grants and contracts with an array of partners in academia, industry, and government in the United States and around the world. The Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, DC, is a subordinate command. ONR also works in close cooperation with the Navy's systems commands and their warfighting centers located across the United States. As a major funder of scientific research since World War II, ONR has had a role in fostering scientific and technological innovations in a wide range of fields, as well as in maintaining the basic scientific research infrastructure that makes these breakthroughs possible. Consequently, historical research on ONR can illuminate discourses in the history of public and science policy, the relationship between government and academia, naval technology, and the military industrial complex, as well as of individual disciplines such as biology, robotics, physics, and numerous other fields.

Born in the aftermath of World War II, ONR was established in August 1946 to maintain the successful partnership of government, academia, and industry that had produced a series of technological innovations during the war. Originally focused on basic science research using contracts, grants were added as a funding tool in 1959. Funding for applied research began in 1980 with the establishment of the Office of Naval Technology, a joint organization also headed by the Chief of Naval Research. The two offices were joined together, and funding for advanced technology development added, in 1993.

Originally located in Washington, DC, in the old Navy Department buildings on the National Mall, ONR is now located in the Ballston neighborhood of Arlington, VA. The Office of Naval Research is managed by the Chief of Naval Research, a naval flag officer, and the Executive Director, a Senior Executive Service civilian. Research activities are divided into two research directorates, Research (Discovery and Invention) and Technology, which oversee and coordinate the six science and technology departments: Expeditionary Warfare; Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance; Ocean Battlespace Sensing; Sea Warfare and Weapons; Warfighter Performance; Naval Air Warfare and Weapons.

Other components of ONR include ONR Global, which has offices in Santiago, Chile; São Paulo, Brazil; London, UK; Prague, Czech Republic; Singapore; and Tokyo, Japan. Founded in 1946 with a single office in London, ONR Global's personnel interact with the international science and technology community and overseas operational commands to foster cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

The Naval Research Advisory Committee, also established by Public Law 588 in 1946, is an independent civilian scientific advisory group dedicated to providing objective analyses in the areas of science, research, and development. The committee is the senior scientific advisory group to the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Chief of Naval Research. It produces one or more reports a year on topics of interest to the Navy and Marine Corps. In its early days, the committee's purview was quite broad, dealing with early atomic energy policy for instance.

## THE ONR HISTORIAN

The office of the historian was created in 2013. The historian provides the command with professional guidance in the field of history and historic preservation, and the public with an extensive program of outreach that includes oral history, research, publications, and multimedia materials. For help with research requests, please contact the historian at [onrpublicaffairs@navy.mil](mailto:onrpublicaffairs@navy.mil) or call 703-696-5031.

## HISTORICAL RECORDS

The list below of secondary sources, dissertations, and primary sources contained in archives and libraries related to ONR is not exhaustive. It is intended to provide an overview of the kinds of resources available to researchers and others seeking to find publicly accessible documents and information about the Office of Naval Research, its research activities, and its relationship with the development of science and technology in the United States and the world since the end of World War II.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

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4. Bowen, Harold G. *Ships, Machinery and Mossbacks: The Autobiography of a Naval Engineer*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954.
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10. \_\_\_\_\_. "Naval Research and Development in World War II," *Journal of the American Society of Naval Engineers* 62 (1950): 21-53.
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13. Kaharl, Victoria A. *Water Baby: The Story of Alvin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
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16. Old, Bruce S. ("The Bird Dogs"). "The Evolution of the Office of Naval Research," *Physics Today* 14 (August 1961): 30-35.
17. Office of Naval Research. *A Decade of Basic and Applied Science in the Navy*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1957.
18. \_\_\_\_\_. *Fifty Years of Excellence in Support of Naval Science: A Symposium in Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Office of Naval Research*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1996.
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24. Roland, Alex. "Science and War." *Osiris*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, Vol. 1 (1985): 247-72.
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## DISSERTATIONS

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2. Damms, Richard V. "Scientists and Statesmen: President Eisenhower's Science Advisors and National Security Policy, 1953-1961." Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1993.
3. Di Mento, John M. "Beyond the Water's Edge: United States National Security and the Ocean Environment." Ph.D. diss., Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2006.

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5. Hamblin, Jacob D. "Oceanography and International Cooperation during the Early Cold War." Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2001.
6. Harper, Kristine C. "Boundaries of Research: Civilian Leadership, Military Funding, and the International Network Surrounding the Development of Numerical Weather Prediction in the United States." Ph.D. diss., Oregon State University, 2003.
7. Matsushita, Marimi. "A Woman Mathematician and Her Contributions: Mina Spiegel Rees." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1998.
8. Moore, Kelly. "Doing Good while Doing Science: The Origins and Consequences of Public Interest Science Organizations in American, 1945-1990." Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1993.
9. O'Donnell, Timothy. "Vannevar Bush, the Endless Frontier, and the Rhetoric of American Science Policy." Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2000.
10. Rowan, Milton. "Politics and Pure Research: The Origins of the National Science Foundation, 1942-1954." Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1985.
11. Shell, Amy Elizabeth. "In Service to Mathematics: The Life and Work of Mina Rees." Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 2000.
12. Sherry, Michael S. "Preparing for the Next War: American Plans for Postwar Defense, 1941-1945." Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1975.
13. Wang, Zuoyue. "American Science and the Cold War: The Rise of the U.S. President's Science Advisory Committee." Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1994.
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## **ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES**

**City University of New York**  
New York, NY  
[www.cuny.edu](http://www.cuny.edu)

Mina Rees Papers

**Harvard University**  
Cambridge, MA  
[www.harvard.edu](http://www.harvard.edu)

Harvard Cyclotron Laboratory Collection

**Library of Congress**

Washington, DC

[www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

*Manuscript Division*

Alan Tower Waterman Papers

*American Folklife Center*

Herndon III, Edward Beverly Herndon III Oral History

Paul A. Vohs Jr. Oral History

Sharon Elaine Jentzer Oral History

**National Archives**

Washington, DC

[www.nara.gov](http://www.nara.gov)

*National Archives at College Park, MD*

Most of the primary source material available concerning ONR is contained at the National Archives facility in College Park, Md. Accessioned documents are found mainly in Record Group 298. This group consists mostly of material dealing with the foundation of ONR in the immediate aftermath of World War II and its predecessor organization during the war, the Navy's Office of the Coordinator of Research and Development. The National Archives also possesses significant records, the bulk of which date from the late 1940s to the 1980s, within RG 298 that are not catalogued well on the archive's website and are best accessed at College Park.

There are also extensive records associated with ONR's many international offices, the first of which was established in London in 1946, that may be found in Department of State record groups as well as in RG 298. Records of the Naval Research Advisory Committee can also be found in RG 298.

Other record groups at College Park that may contain material pertinent to ONR, its components, and the Navy are:

Record Group 19: Bureau of Ships

Record Group 38: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

Record Group 52: Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State

Record Group 72: Bureau of Aeronautics

Record Group 74: Bureau of Ordnance

Record Group 80: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1798-1947

Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State  
Record Group 181: Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments  
Record Group 227: Office of Scientific Research and Development  
Record Group 343: Naval Air Systems Command  
Record Group 344: Naval Ship Systems Command  
Record Group 345: Naval Electronic Systems Command  
Record Group 346: Naval Ordnance Systems Command  
Record Group 402: Bureau of Naval Weapons  
Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1947-

*Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD*

ONR records from the past several decades are kept at this facility. Records kept at federal records center remain in the legal possession of the original submitting agency, so all requests to view ONR records kept here must go through the Office of Naval Research. The records center keeps records officially for 30 years, but because of space considerations there are also other, older records kept here as well that have not been transferred to the National Archives facilities in downtown Washington, DC, or College Park, MD.

**National Museum of American History**

Washington, DC

[americanhistory.si.edu](http://americanhistory.si.edu)

Grace Murray Hopper Collection

**U.S. Naval Academy**

Annapolis, MD

[www.usna.edu](http://www.usna.edu)

Robert Dexter Conrad Papers

**Naval History and Heritage Command**

Washington, DC

[www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil)

*Archives Branch*

Vice Admiral Albert J. Baciocco Papers

Vice Admiral Harold G. Bowen Papers

*Navy Department Library*

This library contains a number of unpublished administrative histories relating to the management of naval science and technology research and development during World War II and to ONR's predecessor, the Office of the Coordinator of Research and Development (see Secondary Sources above, nos. 9, 12, and 23).

**Naval Research Laboratory**

Washington, DC

[library.nrl.navy.mil](http://library.nrl.navy.mil)

The Naval Research Laboratory's research library is the depository for all ONR technical reports, which detail the progress or results of ONR-funded projects and contracts. Among these also are European Scientific Notes, a yearly publication produced by ONR's London office that detailed developments in European science. Many documents and books that once were in the possession of the old ONR library are now deposited at NRL.

NRL also has an extensive collection of oral histories, some of which deal with former ONR personnel as well as ONR-sponsored research.

**Pennsylvania State University**

University Park, PA

[www.psu.edu](http://www.psu.edu)

Samuel King Allison Papers

Alan Tower Waterman Papers

**Princeton University**

Princeton, NJ

[www.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu)

Charles Phelps Smyth Papers

**University of Chicago**

Chicago, IL

[www.uchicago.edu](http://www.uchicago.edu)

Marcel Schein Papers

**University of Texas at Austin**

Austin, TX

[www.utexas.edu](http://www.utexas.edu)

Joseph B. Kruskal Papers

**Yale University**

New Haven, CT

[www.yale.edu](http://www.yale.edu)

Henry Margenau Papers

Records of the Office of Naval Research, Yale University, 1945-1947