PART I: Introducing the Korean War Veterans Digital Memorial

The Korean War Veterans Digital Memorial (KWVDM) is a joint venture of the Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs' Korean Peninsula Affairs Center and the Korean War Veteran's Association of Central New York, Chapter #105. The website was made possible through funding from the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs of the Republic of Korea. The prototype for the digital memorial was unveiled in 2011. The goal of the website is to educate the public about the Korean War, and the role of the US foreign policy in the Republic of Korea's history. KWVDM has a variety of potential users. One group of users may be the elderly who remember the war or may know KWVs. Family, such as children and grandchildren, of KWVs are likely interested users. Researchers at every level from high school onward may access KWVDM. The category of researchers is a huge category including politicians and journalists in addition to teachers and professors. Finally, as a war that involved 15 different countries, interest in the Korean War is international, and thus so is the memorial website. In this report, I intend to enumerate what I see as some of the more problematic aspects of the website from an IA perspective. I shall then offer some improvements for these problematic aspects.

PART II: Critique

CONTENT & ORGANIZATION SYSTEM

Upon the first pass through the KWVDM one may deduce from the title of the site and the homepage that it is meant to preserve and present information about the Korean War. What is less obvious is who has created the website. With a bit more perusing and a visit to the Overview sub-page in the ABOUT section, one is presented with the *When?* and *What?* of the site but the question of *Who?* remains unanswered. It took me several more minutes of clicking around to find out the who the parties *responsible* for the website are. Most of the basic information is present within the website but is buried several clicks deep, sometimes in text-heavy documents. For instance, information about the main administrators for the website is located in "A Short History of KWVDM" in the ABOUT section, which is a text document. I found that the project director for the KWVDM is Jongwoo Han, who is also the president of the KWVDM Foundation, Inc., and that the Program Coordinator is Mr. Youngseek Kim. [1] I had to scroll down the screen to Section 5 of the document to find this information. The *Who?* and *What?* information should be presented on the homepage or just one click away.

The KWVDM took a great deal of collaboration to produce the KWVDM. Due to the varied stakeholders in the project, the information ecology of the site is muddled by incongruities of content and context. This ultimately leaves the user confused about the purpose of the site.

The website comports with the technical definition of the term *memorial*. However, the term *memorial* when used with reference to a war is associated with commendation, commemoration, and appreciation of veterans. Therefore, the organizational scheme and structure are somewhat misaligned with goals implicit in the *title* of the website. The goals of the website stated in the Status Report and 5-Year Expansion Plan[2] are as follows:

> i. To create a permanent and efficient method of recoding the memories and experiences of Korean War veterans;
> ii. To educate future generations about the sacrifices made by KWVs and to pass down lessons learned from

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1   Mr. Youngseek Kim is now Youngseek Kim, Ph.D.
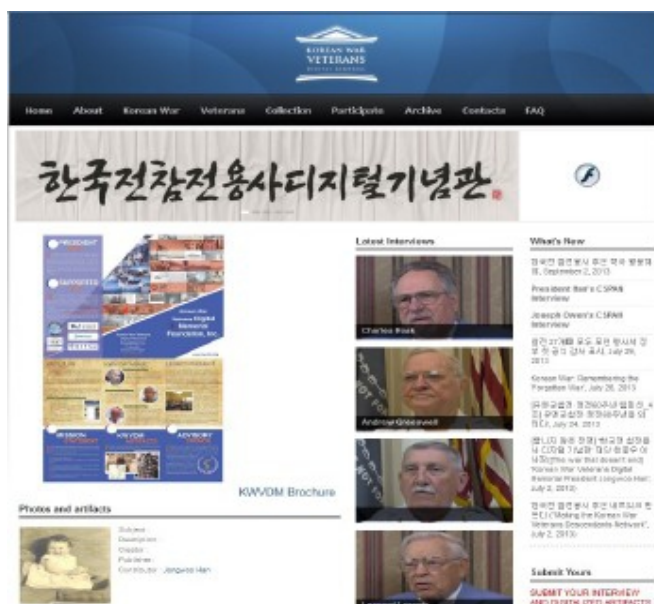2   ABOUT > Overview http://www.kwvdm.org/about.php?p=overview

the Korean War;

iii. To emphasize the importance of a mutual relationship between the United States and Republic of Korea that was built on the blood of Americans and Koreans during the Korean War;

iv. To symbolize the peace founded on the Korean Peninsula when the Armistice was replaced with a peace treaty thanks to the sacrifices of KWVs.[3]

The content offered in support of these four goals [4] is difficult to synthesize, especially using the current organizational scheme of the website. For instance, the sub-pages that explicitly document the inconsistencies of the US policy towards Korea and which refer to the ignorance of the American military, its military blunders and the awkwardness of a US president[5] is out of step with honoring war veterans. At this time in the US, volunteer military was instituted. It has been well-documented elsewhere that soldiers generally adopt an idealistic view of the country for which they are risking their lives. Thus, the summary of US policy inconsistencies in the same space where the "sacrifice made by KWVs" is supposedly *memorialized* may not sit well with veterans and their families.[6]

Because video-stills of only white Caucasian veterans are shown on the homepage, a user may think that the site is dedicated to American veterans of the Korean War. [7] But, actually it is unclear which veterans are the subject this site. Americans? Koreans? Both? Notwithstanding that the stated goal #3 mentions the blood of Americans *and* Koreans, the thrust of the site's expansion covers only the US in the near future. Any plans to formally conduct interviews or to expand the prototype specifically to the ROK are conspicuously absent. [8]

Video screen-stills of only white veterans.

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3   ibid.

4   A discrepancy exists between the site and the brochure (http://www.kwvdm.org/KWVDM-contents/Brochure.jpg) which has five goals. The website is serving as the standard of content for this paper.

5   See "The Road Not Taken" under KOREAN WAR.

6   This slight offense may cause KWVs in other US states to decline participation in the future.

7   Other aspects of the website give this impression too. Under ARCHIVE > Letters, the video "Letter from Korea" by the Korean Ministry of Patriots & Veterans Affairs is an extended thank you to American war veterans.

8   See Overview #7 in ABOUT. An exception to this point could be the Youth Research programs.

Within a digital *archive,* presentation of multiple viewpoints would be appropriate. But this site is billed as a *veterans' memorial*, and therefore should focus most on memorializing the veterans. For these reasons, the cogency of the web site's project is at stake. This could translate to fewer explorers of the site as newcomers will perhaps not browse a site that is not quickly comprehended. Users are unlikely to invest time and energy in websites whose purposes and uses are not apparent.

Most of the problems in this website are due to the fact that incongruous content is mingled together on the site. This presents problems for the organization system, the labeling system and the navigation system, all of which are inter-related. There are, I found, three types of content on this site: personal information about American war veterans; history and analysis of the Korean War; and information about the KWVDM website project itself. Actually, there is too much information about the KWVDM presented on a web page dedicated to KWVs. For a user interested in researching a war veteran, documents relating to publicizing the website clutter its navigational paths.

LABELING, NAVIGATION, and SEARCH SYSTEMS

The labeling system of a website should indicate its organizational scheme and the navigational choices available to the user. KWVDM's labeling would benefit from content re-organization. In the absence of re-organization though, more precise labeling may be achieved by adding an extra adjective or two. In this global navigation bar, there is no meaningful semantic difference between the terms ABOUT and FAQ, or between COLLECTION and ARCHIVE. Indeed, there is no real distinction in the content of ABOUT and FAQ. There is a distinction between the *content* of COLLECTION and ARCHIVE.
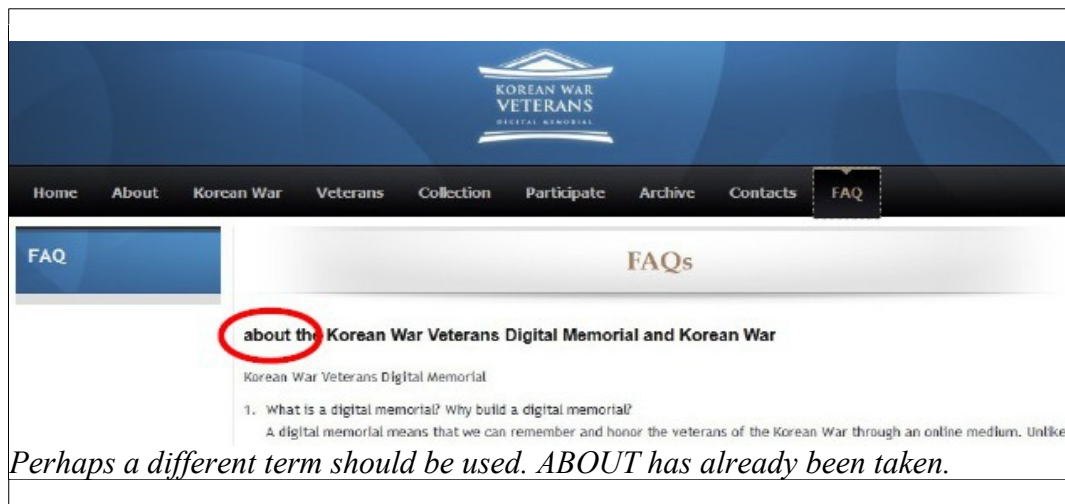

These top-level labels should be more descriptive and/or semantically meaningful.

ARCHIVE could be understood to be about the Korean War. Yet, the archived document and media presented in this section is about the website itself, or the director of the website. [9] Revising the label to "KWVDM Project Archives" would save time for users not interested in this aspect of the site. As it stands, the labeling system does not support the main task of most users, which would be to learn about the veterans. Moreover, imprecise and repetitive use of labels will frustrate users, especially in a disorganized setting where users must rely more on their memories for navigation. For example, it is unclear what content is stored under the Notice label in ARCHIVES. The example below shows is an example of needless and confusing repetitious word-use. ARCHIVE could be understood to be about the Korean War. Yet, the archived document and media presented in this section is about the website itself, or the director of the website. [10] Revising the label to "KWVDM Project Archives" would save time for users not interested in this aspect of the site.

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9   Users interested in the Korean War veterans are not likely to also be looking for press releases about Dr. Han and his media campaign for the site.
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Perhaps a different term should be used. ABOUT has already been taken.

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One site-wide labeling problem is with text that is underlined for emphasis which makes the texts appear as hyperlinks. The dates in the time line of the US Policy Inconsistencies page, under KOREAN WAR serve as an example of this.   Also regarding the presentation of hyperlinks, the language used to label them is inconsistent. The site should be fully accessible in English and/or fully accessible in Korean. If English is the preferred language of the site (and its pervasiveness on the site suggests that it is) then all links written in Korean typography should have English translations next to them. These untranslated links are particularly numerous in the "News and Media Coverage of the Korean War Veterans Digital Memorial" in the Media unit of the ARCHIVE section.
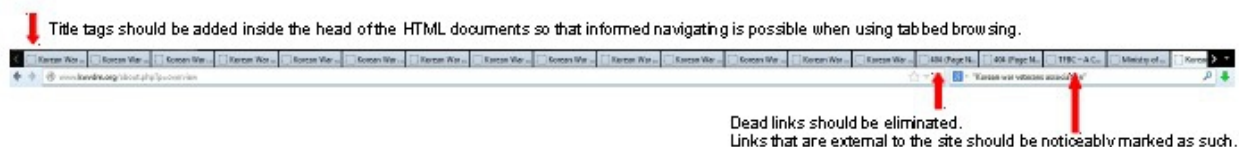

Links in another language should be translated to the language of the site.

The iconic labels that appear in the global navigation bar are a minor issue. Arrows appear in the drop-down menu of the bar, which usually indicates further options. There are no further options, which may frustrate users when options fail to appear.

For tabbed browsing, both labeling and navigation are issues for the title in the tab of each page. Navigation during tabbed browsing would greatly be improved if each page was labeled by a title tag in the head section of its HTML document. Currently, the tab of every page is labeled "Korean War Veterans Digital Memorial" which makes it difficult to use tabbed browsing to refer back and forth between the pages. Still, the sidebar on KWVDM's interface is helpful for keeping the user informed about her location within the site. Browsing is the main mechanism of orienting the user; most navigation occurs through browsing.

A navigation system should facilitate movement   and findability within a website. Findability is a problem in some parts of the KWVDM site. Problems with navigating the website, however are mostly due to the problematic organization of the content as well as the imprecise and non-descriptive labeling, such as Notice under ARCHIVES. Also, in my opinion, the VETERANS and COLLECTION part of the website should be better presented so as to draw more attention to it.   The KWVDM website does not have a site-map to supplement its navigation. This is particularly problematic because of the non-intuitive organizational scheme of KWVDM. The users of the KWVDM site are likely to be varied, particularly in age, and a site-map can resolve findability issues.

Although users navigate the website proper by browsing, they may access artifacts, oral histories, and veterans through a search system in addition to browsing. The artifacts and oral histories are described using metadata,   and located by that.   However, the metadata is inconsistently applied to artifacts and individual veterans. Clarifying to users what metadata is and what metadata is actually searched by the search system would be helpful. For instance, the hobbies and ages of veterans alongside their names appear to be searchable but are not. Moreover, some artifacts have no metadata and some of the veterans have no information attached to their names. Dealing with spotty or absent metadata is a common problem for archivists, who have developed ways of working around metadata problems.

Information Architecture, as a relatively new field, has yet to develop a codified set of standards for websites, partially because websites are—at this point—are innumerable and extremely multifarious, which complicates the endeavor. However, one way of understanding standards is to notice the commonalities of comparative websites.   [11] Because the KWVDM is a forerunner in digital memorials it is difficult to locate appropriate websites for comparison. However, if one looks to the world of digital archives, there are more choices. One noticeable

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11 Investigations of this sort are a necessary step in the process of benchmarking.

feature across websites is that the interface often did not display corresponding metadata when a representation of an object was displayed. Basic information was displayed along side the image, and extended descriptions or explanations of the representations were also offered. This same practice would enhance KWVDM. For instance, regarding the artifact representation below, the only difference in the metadata of these two artifacts is in the numeral in parentheses in the title. Clearly, there is a difference between the two representations, which should be reflected in the *Description* data field of the metadata structure. Also, what is the significance of the blank service record to the right? If the significance is not evident, it should be explained in the metadata or elsewhere in the display.

Therefore, for the KWVDM site, when data content is absent from a data field, no part of that particular data element should be displayed to the user. This is a problem in the COLLECTION section. Empty data elements are shown next to an artifact on the homepage which may give users a negative feeling about the site before they begin to explore it. Also, many of the awards and historical artifacts need some sort of context or explanation so that the user may understand their significance. Finally, the artifacts that are publications are presented in one size, and as such the type is too small to read—which somewhat defeats the point of digitally archiving them. The KWVDM should consider a scale-up function for the artifact representations.

PART III: Improvements

My suggestions for improvement are based on the critique of problem areas of the website. The first suggestion for improvement is to change the title of the KWVDM website. A more appropriate name in my opinion would be the KWV Digital *Archive*. Changing the title to *archive* would accommodate content growth better, as well as align better with the current content.

Second, refine and align the purpose and mission of the website. KWVDM apparently serves as both a *memorial* for KWVs and an archive for the KWVDM website itself. Information about the evolution of and expansion plans for the website itself should not be included in a memorial to the vets. The content of the site includes the archives, commentary on the war, and KWVDM promotional materials. Dividing the content this way and clearly labeling the content will improve navigation and organization immensely as well as allow for accurate comprehension of the site. This second suggestion is especially important if the name of the site is to stay the same, i.e. *digital memorial* instead of *digital archive*. The content about the KWVDM project itself does not necessarily need to be removed but it should be de-emphasized and better labeled.

Third, be more selective about the content included in the website, globally. Selectivity regarding the Artifacts in the COLLECTION section of the website is also advisable. There are too many Personal Records included in the collection and the Document section is overwhelmed with content, possibly owing to the fact that it is an essentially an undefined category and thus a "catch all" category. If the administrators decide to retain the information about the KWVDM site itself, be more selective about what content is displayed to the public. Moreover, the information presented in each section should be consistent. Under ARCHIVE > Letters, the information included is related to the website, but a video presented above the letter is a general thank you which has aught to do with the website. This is the sort of inconsistency and co-mingling of content that needlessly lowers the usability of this website, which obviously fills a niche.

There are a couple of miscellaneous improvements straddling the different systems that will aid the user experience. For one, adding a general search box for veterans and artifacts to the main page could streamline a researchers experience. In the COLLECTION section, a *Back* button should be added so that users do not have to use the back button provided by the browser. Users may be hesitant to use the browser's back arrow icon for fear of leaving the site altogether. A simple addition of a back button or arrow within the website will contribute to a better user experience. And, of course, all dead links should be eliminated and external links should be

labeled.

        In light of the criticisms of this website, it may be appropriate to end on a high note and examine some of the major things that the website has done well. The KWVDM does a very good job at maintaining an appropriate hierarchy. Most of the specific hierarchies are fairly shallow which makes for a more pleasant navigational experience. Once the labels are standardized, i.e. labels like interviews are changed to oral histories, the user will also know where in the website she is by the interface alone. Also, the browsing system for KWVDM and its consistent interface create few error-prone conditions.

        The KWVDM is a unique website with an enthusiastic promoter in Dr. Han. When searching the phrase *digital memorial*, the number of results returned in Google or DuckDuckGo that reference KWVDM is impressive. There is clearly an interest for a website of this kind. To really succeed though, the site must clarify and align their goals and content in such a way that enable the tasks of different stakeholders, such as researchers of the Korean War and the children or a Korean War veteran. The KWVDM is useful and interesting to both kinds of stakeholders. I look forward to viewing the KWVDM in the coming years.