

# VETERANS' STORIES

## THE VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

The Veterans History Project (VHP) collects, preserves, and makes available the personal stories of American war veterans and civilian workers who supported them. These collections of firsthand accounts are gathered for use by researchers and so that future generations may hear directly from veterans to better understand the realities of war. Thousands of these accounts are available to everyone on the VHP Web site, [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets).



Frederick Wright Arnold  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.05957/>

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The VHP, which is a special project of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, is the largest oral history project in U.S. history. Since it was founded in 2000, it has collected over 65,000 items from thousands of veterans. Approximately 150 additional items are added every week. These items can take many forms from personal narratives (audio and video-taped interviews, written memoirs) and correspondence (letters, postcards, v-mail, personal diaries) to visual materials (photographs, drawings, scrapbooks). All of them, though, tell the stories of veterans or of U.S. citizens who were actively involved in supporting war efforts, beginning with World War I and continuing through the conflicts of the 21st century.

The materials collected by the Veterans History Project come from many sources, including the veterans

themselves and their families. Most of the interviews are conducted by volunteers who donate their time to record the veterans' oral histories.

#### **What Are Oral Histories?**

Oral histories are firsthand accounts of events collected from the people who witnessed or participated in them, usually through spoken interviews. Oral histories are among the oldest accounts of human history, and still play an important role in the 21st century. Portable recording devices and digital publishing make it easier than ever to gather people's stories and make them available to a wider audience.

#### **Collecting Oral Histories**

Gathering the stories of friends, relatives, and neighbors can provide young people with a unique

opportunity to explore the history of their families and communities, as well as bringing them into contact with extremely personal aspects of larger historical events. In addition, the process of collecting oral histories can help students build crucial academic skills, as they conduct their preparatory research and plan and structure their interviews.

The Veterans History Project encourages educators and students in 10th grade and above to participate in the Project. The Veterans History Project offers a guide, "Especially for Educators and Students," on how to conduct interviews with veterans and submit materials to the VHP.



American soldier...  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002722514/>

### Analyzing Oral Histories

In addition to collecting oral histories, students can also build their critical thinking skills by analyzing oral histories that have already been recorded. Closely examining these firsthand accounts helps students discover a powerful

sense of history and the complexity of the past. By asking critical questions of the informants' accounts, students can also explore issues of bias and point of view, as well as identifying questions for further investigation.



R. Clint Cobb  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.48616/>

Thousands of oral histories are available on the Library's Web site, loc.gov. These range from the

stories of former slaves to eyewitness accounts of the attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as the stories preserved by the Veterans History Project. Used together with the teaching ideas suggested below and the Primary Source Analysis Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Oral Histories these unique accounts can serve as a gateway to new discovery and inquiry for students of all ages.



Lisa Joy Bard  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.28406/>

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

These Library of Congress primary source materials support teaching about 20th-century U.S. history, social studies, or oral history. They may be of special interest near Veterans Day.

Research major historical events that the veteran describes and create a brief timeline that includes events that happened immediately before and after the events described. How do the veteran's experiences compare to the published accounts of the events? What does the veteran omit? What does the veteran include that the published account does not?

List the specific problems that the veteran faced. Which problems were longstanding? Which problems were created or worsened by the war?

Invite students to retell a portion of the veteran's story by paraphrasing, drawing, or acting it out.

Study the questions the interviewer asks and the veteran's answers.

- Which question(s) do you think prompted the most interesting responses?
- Which question(s) do you think prompted the least interesting responses?
- In each case, why do you think that is true?
- If you were the interviewer, what questions would you ask?



M-4 tank crews...  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1992001087/PP/>

Many of the collections include photographs and drawings. What emotions are expressed in these images? Select a few that include titles and consider how the text changes what can be learned from the images alone.

Write a letter to a veteran you've studied. Consider including your thoughts on what touched you; what questions you would like to ask; and reflections on the veteran's service.

Choose two or more veterans from the same war and compare how they describe their experiences.

Choose two or more veterans from different eras. Compare their experiences. Consider the equipment available, descriptions of their service, and the technologies they used to communicate on the battlefield and back home.

Consider why it is important to collect and preserve these materials.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



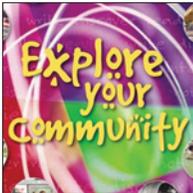
### Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/themes.html>



### Especially for Educators and Students

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/youth-resources.html>



### Explore Your Community

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/poster/index.html>



### Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tool

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

## PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



Frederick Wright Arnold. From Frederick Wright Arnold Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.05957/>



"The life expectancy of a truck driver in Vietnam." Video clip. From Thomas Hodge Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.03736/>



"1st Lt. Brian Markle and 2nd Lt. Jeanne (Urbin) Markle, shortly after their wedding." Photograph. From Jeanne A. Urbin Markle Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

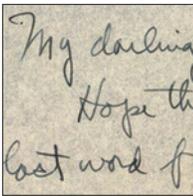
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.03442/enlarge?ID=ph0001001&page=1>



"The real strength of American defense; volunteering for Vietnam." Video Clip. From Max Cleland Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.03512/>



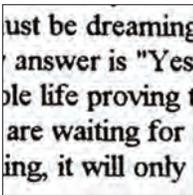
"Jungle Snoozing." Artwork. From Samuel Boylston Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01848/enlarge?ID=pm0025001&page=1>



"Tracy A. Sugarman to his wife, June 1, 1944." Letter. From Tracy Sugarman Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.05440/pageturner?ID=pm0086001>



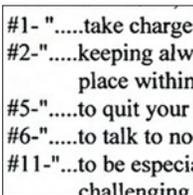
"Crew off duty." Artwork. From Tracy Sugarman Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.05440/artworks?page=6>



"Still in New Orleans: A marriage proposal." Memoir. From Denton Crocker Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00392/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=68>



"Learning the rules of the POW camp." Video clip. From Nathaniel Raley Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00449/>



"First page of his memoir." Memoir. From Paul Steppe Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.04941/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=3>



“Axis POW’s.” Photograph. From Robert Lee Olen Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02008/album?page=3>



“This is a real war picture.” Photograph. From James Walsh Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01939/enlarge?ID=ph0022001&page=1>



“Volunteering for Vietnam instead of going to Germany.” Video clip. From Charles Hagel Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02230/>



“The decency of the old OSS; turning down a mission.” Video clip. From Rafael Hirtz Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00094/>



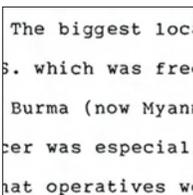
“The shock of boot camp.” Video clip. From Ronald Winter Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.03769/>



“Gunner Nice of the ‘Devil-Dogs.’” Article. From William Nice Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01339/>



“A GI Odyssey.” Memoir. From John Enman Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00817/enlarge?ID=pm0001001&page=14>



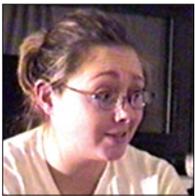
"Mud on Leyte Island." Artwork. From Carl Hall Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.27180/enlarge?ID=pm0004001&page=1>



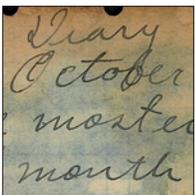
"His tour of duty in Afghanistan as a JAG office." Video clip. From Timothy Rieger Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.44622/>



"Job assignments in Iraq." Video clip. From Krystyna Kalski Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.24407/>



"Diary of Albert John Carpenter." Photograph. From Albert John Carpenter Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00225/pageturner?ID=pm0002001>



"Saved by the Chinese from being shot." Video clip. From Jose Mares Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.06059/>



"Details on his physical and emotional healing." Video clip. From James Mayer Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.19266/>



"How his family was uprooted by the Korean War." Video clip. From Raymond Kasten Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.57057/>