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HIS 337

F 2019

Oral History Project

One of the virtues of studying recent U.S. history is that many of the participants are still alive and available as sources for our research. In the context of this course, that means that many veterans are available to share their experiences, and by listening to them we can quickly learn that there is no was no single experience of or attitude about the war.

Interviewing veterans can thus add richness and depth to our analysis of the past, often providing information and perspectives that are otherwise absent from the historical record. However, the presence of these actors is also a challenge – they may have perspectives that are at odds with other sources, they may have inaccurate or incomplete remembrances of events, and – unlike a document – they can (and will!) read what you write about them. Oral history is thus a method of historical research that hold tremendous potential and some peril. To be successful, then, the interviewer must be well-prepared, thoughtful, and ethical.

Part of your work for this class will be conducting an oral history with a local Vietnam-era veteran. Five veterans associated with 'The Veterans' Breakfast Club, an area non-profit dedicated to sharing veterans' stories with the public, have volunteered to work with us. They are:

- Larry Woods, Air Force Security Forces, Tuy Hoa
- Richard Gotch, Army, ARVN advisor
- Jim Puhala, Army, Huey helicopter pilot
- George Dvorznak, Army, company commander, Quartermaster
- Ron Worstell, Army, 1st Infantry Division

Next week, I will ask you to rate your top three choices of the veteran you would like to speak with, and I will do my best to satisfy everyone.

Your assignment is three-fold:

1. You will conduct an oral history (consisting of one or more interview sessions) with your veteran, in which you will follow the best practices of the field. This will involve meeting your veteran, obtaining informed consent for the interview, drafting questions or talking points, conducting the interview(s), producing a transcript of that interview, and correcting it in collaboration with the interviewee.
2. You will, with your partner(s), write a five-page paper in which you place your veteran's experience and perspective in the context of the larger war, drawing upon our readings and discussions.
3. You will, with your partner(s), produce materials for a small exhibit on the diverse experiences of local veterans. This will require that you produce a professional-grade poster (using PowerPoint) that identifies your veteran and describes his experience and attitude and that you work with your veteran to secure the loan or reproduction of photographs and other items that can be displayed in exhibit cases in the library. You will then write the brief descriptions of these items that will allow members of our community to learn about the veterans' experience.

Our last day of class will be devoted to installing this exhibit, and we will have a small reception in the library on Tuesday, 12/10 to thank our veterans for their participation and show them our work. At this point, we will open the exhibit to the College and the Community.

Your paper and a copy of the oral history will be due at this point as well.

This assignment is worth 20% of your final grade.