

# Veterans' Oral Histories

Annotated Bibliography for 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

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This bibliography will be useful to researchers, teachers, and community activists who are interested in the theory, practice, methodology, ethics, and legal aspects of conducting and analyzing oral histories with veterans.

Allison, Fred H. "Remembering a Vietnam War Firefight: Changing Perspectives over Time." *Oral History Review* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2004): 69–83.

Marine Corps Oral Historian Fred Allison explores how veterans remember and retell combat. Allison compares two interviews of the same Marine talking about the same horrific Vietnam firefight in which five of eight Marines on a reconnaissance patrol were killed. One interview took place in Vietnam two days after the firefight, whereas the second interview was conducted 34 years later. The early interview is an oral snapshot of the world of a combat Marine, whereas the later interview is a study of how memory reconstructs a combat experience. In comparing the two interviews the reader can begin to understand how veterans' memory works to organize and make comprehensible an event that might not have been orderly or comprehensible in the first place.

Appy, Christian G. *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

Historian Christian Appy's collection is a remarkable set of perspectives on the American war in Vietnam through hundreds of interviews with war hawks and peace activists; former Vietcong Guerilla fighters, Vietnamese Communists, Vietnamese anti-Communists; American veterans of all stripes, from privates to generals medics to infantrymen; POW/MIA activists; poets, novelists, journalists; entertainers; and former government officials from all sides. Interviews were conducted with citizens of the United States, North and South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, France, and China. Rather than a coherent and overarching narrative about the war, what one gets is a kaleidoscope of perspectives with multiple meanings. Appy weaves together the idea of patriotism as understood through multiple perspectives.

Baylor University Institute for Oral History. "Introduction to Oral History." *Introduction to Oral History*. <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/43912.pdf>.

The Institute for Oral History at Baylor University offers a vast number of resources on the practice, ethics, and collections of oral histories. In addition to explaining the field of oral history, this on line guide addresses practical issues such as how to plan a project, prepare legal documents, select recording devices, create a question list, as well as preserving and disseminating interviews. This site includes an extensive transcription style guide that serves as the standard in the field. The Institute offers a number of grants and workshops for those interested in practicing oral history.

Darien, Andrew. "Hearts, Minds and Voices: Oral History and the Vietnam War," in Tully, John Day, Matthew Masur, and Brad Austin, eds. *Understanding and Teaching the Vietnam War*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

This book chapter is designed to help teachers in several related and important ways. First, it introduces a variety of collections of published and digital oral histories, highlighting the focus and strength of each one. Second, it reminds teachers to have their students ask for specific questions of the oral histories they are considering, offering practical suggestions about how to discuss historiography and source criticism with students. The chapter address issues of representation, memory, shared authority, and emotional intelligence in collecting voices about the Vietnam War.

Davis, Roger, Ellis, Mark R, and Van Ingen, Linda. "Civic Engagement and Task Force Teaching: Integrating the Veterans History Project into the University Classroom" *The History Teacher*, Vol. 42: 3 (May, 2009): 341-349.

This pedagogically oriented article reviews a coordinated effort between the Nebraska State Senate and the University of Nebraska at Kearney to implement the congressionally mandated Veterans History Project. The authors assess the institutional and pedagogical challenges to integrating the Veterans History Project into the university curriculum, as well as the ways in which they were overcome through civic engagement across the campus and the community at large. The article identify strategies for securing viable oral history candidates; arranging interviews; determining interview setting; processing forms; conducting interviews; creating transcriptions; and providing outcomes assessment.

Estes, Steve. "Ask and Tell: Gay Veterans, Identity, and Oral History on a Civil Rights Frontier." *Oral History Review* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 21-47.

Estes addresses the silence about gays in the military and what he identifies as the amnesia about their service. The article shows how oral history provides a means of breaking the silence about the "don't ask, don't tell" period in American military history. Estes interviewed more than fifty gay and lesbian veterans to chronicle the evolution of military policy regarding homosexuality since World War II. He explores the intersection of veterans' identities based on race, sexuality, and military service, focusing on the relationship between racism and homophobia in the military; contrasting experiences of gay men and lesbians; varying attitudes about military service within gay communities; and the evolving nature of gay veterans' identities.

Lofgren, Stephen J. "The Status of Oral History in the Army: Expanding a Tradition." *Oral History Review* 30, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 81-97..

This article will be useful to those seeking to understand the ways in which the U.S. Army has utilized oral history both for internal studies and official histories to supplement the official records and documents. This article summarizes the origins of the modern Army oral history program with a focus on the 1980s and 1990s. The author offers descriptions of three representative oral history efforts: coverage of U.S. Army operations in Bosnia, the exit interview program, and coverage of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

"Principles and Best Practices." *Oral History Association*. October, 2009. [http://www.oralhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/OHA\\_principles\\_standards.pdf](http://www.oralhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/OHA_principles_standards.pdf).

Since 1966, the Oral History Association has served as the principal membership organization for people committed to the standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, dissemination and uses of oral testimony. To guide and advise those concerned with oral documentation, the OHA has established a set of goals, guidelines, and evaluation standards for oral history interviews. This best practices guide serves a broad and diverse audience of teachers, students, community historians, archivists, and filmmakers.

Sommer, Barbara W. *Doing Veterans Oral History*. Oral History Association and the Library of Congress, 2015.

Sommer is a seasoned oral historian who has published several ground breaking works on the practice of oral history. This publication borrows a title from Donald Ritchie's classic *Doing Oral History* and applies many of its principles to working specifically with veterans. It explores questions such contacting prospective interviewees, pairing appropriate interviewers with narrators, developing a complementary research agenda, and question formulation. Sommer has apt suggestions regarding interview setting, body language, verbal cues, dress, and interview time management.