

Veterans History Project

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I. Scope

The Veterans History Project (VHP) of the American Folklife Center was established by Congress in Public Law 106-380. The purpose was “to create a new federally sponsored, authorized and funded program that will coordinate at the national level the collection of video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of American war veterans, and to assist and encourage local efforts to preserve the memories of this Nation’s war veterans so that Americans of all current and future generations may hear directly from veterans and better appreciate the realities of war and the sacrifices made by those who served in uniform during wartime.” ([See appendix A, PL 106-380](#)).

The Veterans History Project accepts first-hand accounts of service by men and women who served in uniform for the United States, primarily during major conflicts beginning with World War I and continuing through the recent 21st Century conflicts. For purposes of this policy statement, a veteran is defined by the Department of Veterans Affairs as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and was discharged or released from service under conditions “other than dishonorable” (VHA Handbook 1601A.02.April 3.2015). In November 2016, the Gold Star Families Voice Act expanded the original scope of the Veterans History Project to include oral histories by immediate family members (parent, spouse, sibling, or child) of “members of the Armed Forces who died as a result of their service during a period of war.” ([See appendix B, PL 114-246](#)). Due to the sensitive nature of the Gold Star oral histories, the Veterans History Project requires a minimum age of 18 for both the interviewers and the interviewees.

VHP relies on volunteers throughout the nation to collect veterans’ stories. It archives its collections at the Library of Congress and makes them available to researchers and the public.

VHP is primarily intended to be an oral history project containing audio or video recordings of veterans’ first-person accounts. In addition to these oral histories, VHP also selectively accepts original materials to include letters, photographs, diaries, memoirs, and journals from veterans or their family members that also provide a means of telling a veteran’s story from their own perspective.

II. Research strengths

Since accepting its first donation of materials in 2001, the Veterans History Project has grown into an archive of over 100,000 collections, each telling a unique story of service to the United States. No other archive of U.S. military experiences can match the breadth of the Veterans History Project. In documenting the stories of individuals, the vast majority of them are not from high-ranking officers or about the heroic wartime accounts often highlighted in the media, movies or literature but rather they are remembrances of the human experience of military service and sacrifice from men and women who come from all backgrounds, ethnicities and who performed honorably in a wide variety of military duties. VHP emphasizes that each story of service from the veterans themselves is important to the understanding of the realities of war.

The Project established itself with a network of veterans' organizations, affiliated archives and museums, and academic institutions, as well as individuals with an interest in recording veterans' histories, thus ensuring an ongoing interest in our work and a steady stream of donations, numbering nearly 100 a week.

Collections are digitized and put online as resources permit, resulting in access being provided to the stories in every home, library, and classroom with a computer and internet access. The online searchable database allows researchers to organize reference searches into dozens of combinations. The number of collections digitized continues to grow, offering researchers, scholars and individual citizens a chance to explore the details of a broader array of US veterans' stories.

III. Collecting policy

The accounts VHP accepts may take several forms: (1) first-person oral history interviews on video or audio* (minimum length: 30 minutes); (2) veterans' own original correspondence, diaries, or journals, or copies of self-published memoirs (minimum: 20 pages or 10 letters, unless submitted with an interview); VHP prefers those portions of a memoir that deal with military service; (3) contemporaneous visual documentation of service experiences, such as scrapbooks, original photographs or high-quality scans of photos, original art work, motion pictures, and videos (minimum quantity: 10 photos or works of art, unless submitted with an interview); (4) official military records, and official military and other contemporaneous instructional or informational pamphlets that enhance accounts of an individual veteran's story of service (only as supplements to any of the first three items).

* The Veterans History Project accepts audio and video recordings in a variety of media and formats, with some exceptions. For further details on acceptable and unacceptable formats, consult the VHP web site (<https://www.loc.gov/vets>) or the VHP Field Kit (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/fieldkit.html>).

IV. Exclusions

The Veterans History Project does not accept

1. Micro-cassettes or MP-3s
2. Photocopies of any material--photographs, correspondence, diaries, or journals-- for which the veteran possesses the original (exceptions on a case-by-case basis)
3. Three-dimensional objects, such as uniforms, medals, weapons, and souvenirs
4. Framed materials
5. Published materials, such as books, major periodicals and newspapers (such as *Life*, *Stars and Stripes*, etc.) that are in the Library of Congress's catalog
6. Three-dimensional works of art (sculpture, collages, works of fiber arts)
7. Proxy interviews done on behalf of veterans*
8. Group interviews, unit histories, or written compilations of veterans' stories
9. Collections of veterans who performed military service for other countries
10. Collections with scant amount of materials (interviews under 30 minutes, memoirs under 20 pages, fewer than 10 original photographs)
11. Official government photographs, such as those taken by the Signal Corps
12. Computer discs without an accompanying hard copy of the material on them. For details on acceptable formats, see the VHP web site (<https://www.loc.gov/vets>) or Field Kit (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/fieldkit.html>).

The Veterans History Project returns any materials which do not meet its minimum standards.

*Exceptions will be made for oral histories collected under the auspices of the Gold Star Families Voices Act.

V. Collecting priorities

While continuing to maintain high interest in collecting interviews and written accounts from all American war veterans, VHP has four current collecting priorities:

- (1) collect the accounts of the oldest segment of veterans, those who served in World War II and the Korean War
- (2) collect the accounts of female veterans and veterans representing minority communities
- (3) improve the intellectual and technical qualities of interviews
- (4) solicit the donation of the recorded reminiscences of all American war veterans

The collecting policy, including the priorities, echo the principal goals outlined in the enabling legislation which is to collect, preserve and provide access to veterans' accounts, to gather the accounts of those aging veterans first, and to create an archive that reflects the diversity of the overall military population.

Revised July 2017

Public Law 106–380
106th Congress

An Act

To direct the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to establish a program to collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of American war veterans, and for other purposes.

Oct. 27, 2000
[H.R. 5212]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Veterans’ Oral History Project Act”.

Veterans’ Oral
History Project
Act.
20 USC 2101
note.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS; PURPOSE.

20 USC 2141.

(a) **FINDINGS.**—Congress finds as follows:

(1) Military service during a time of war is the highest sacrifice a citizen may make for his or her country.

(2) 4,700,000 Americans served in World War I, 16,500,000 Americans served in World War II, 6,800,000 Americans served in the Korean Conflict, 9,200,000 Americans served in the Vietnam Conflict, 3,800,000 Americans served in the Persian Gulf War, and countless other Americans served in military engagements overseas throughout the 20th century.

(3) The Department of Veterans Affairs reports that there are almost 19,000,000 war veterans living in this Nation today.

(4) Today there are only approximately 3,400 living veterans of World War I, and of the some 6,000,000 veterans of World War II alive today, almost 1,500 die each day.

(5) Oral histories are of immeasurable value to historians, researchers, authors, journalists, film makers, scholars, students, and citizens of all walks of life.

(6) War veterans possess an invaluable resource in their memories of the conflicts in which they served, and can provide a rich history of our Nation and its people through the retelling of those memories, yet frequently those who served during times of conflict are reticent to family and friends about their experiences.

(7) It is in the Nation’s best interest to collect and catalog oral histories of American war veterans so that future generations will have original sources of information regarding the lives and times of those who served in war and the conditions under which they endured, so that Americans will always remember those who served in war and may learn first-hand of the heroics, tediousness, horrors, and triumphs of war.

(8) The Library of Congress, as the Nation’s oldest Federal cultural institution and largest and most inclusive library in human history (with nearly 119,000,000 items in its multimedia

collection) is an appropriate repository to collect, preserve, and make available to the public an archive of these oral histories. The Library's American Folklife Center has expertise in the management of documentation projects and experience in the development of cultural and educational programs for the public.

(b) **PURPOSE.**—It is the purpose of this Act to create a new federally sponsored, authorized, and funded program that will coordinate at a national level the collection of video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of American war veterans, and to assist and encourage local efforts to preserve the memories of this Nation's war veterans so that Americans of all current and future generations may hear directly from veterans and better appreciate the realities of war and the sacrifices made by those who served in uniform during wartime.

20 USC 2142.

SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM AT AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER TO COLLECT VIDEO AND AUDIO RECORDINGS OF HISTORIES OF VETERANS.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Director of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress shall establish an oral history program—

(1) to collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of veterans of the Armed Forces who served during a period of war;

(2) to create a collection of the recordings obtained (including a catalog and index) which will be available for public use through the National Digital Library of the Library of Congress and such other methods as the Director considers appropriate to the extent feasible subject to available resources; and

(3) to solicit, reproduce, and collect written materials (such as letters and diaries) relevant to the personal histories of veterans of the Armed Forces who served during a period of war and to catalog such materials in a manner the Director considers appropriate, consistent with and complimentary to the efforts described in paragraphs (1) and (2).

(b) **USE OF AND CONSULTATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES.**—The Director may carry out the activities described in paragraphs (1) and (3) of subsection (a) through agreements and partnerships entered into with other government and private entities, and may otherwise consult with interested persons (within the limits of available resources) and develop appropriate guidelines and arrangements for soliciting, acquiring, and making available recordings under the program under this Act.

(c) **TIMING.**—As soon as practicable after the enactment of this Act, the Director shall begin collecting video and audio recordings under subsection (a)(1), and shall attempt to collect the first such recordings from the oldest veterans.

20 USC 2143.

SEC. 4. PRIVATE SUPPORT.

(a) **ACCEPTANCE OF DONATIONS.**—The Librarian of Congress may solicit and accept donations of funds and in-kind contributions to carry out the oral history program under section 3.

(b) **ESTABLISHMENT OF SEPARATE GIFT ACCOUNT.**—There is established in the Treasury (among the accounts of the Library of Congress) a gift account for the oral history program under section 3.

(c) DEDICATION OF FUNDS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law—

(1) any funds donated to the Librarian of Congress to carry out the oral history program under section 3 shall be deposited entirely into the gift account established under subsection (b);

(2) the funds contained in such account shall be used solely to carry out the oral history program under section 3; and

(3) the Librarian of Congress may not deposit into such account any funds donated to the Librarian which are not donated for the exclusive purpose of carrying out the oral history program under section 3.

SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

20 USC 2144.

There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act—

(1) \$250,000 for fiscal year 2001; and

(2) such sums as may be necessary for each succeeding fiscal year.

Approved October 27, 2000.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 5212:

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 146 (2000):

Oct. 4, considered and passed House.

Oct. 17, considered and passed Senate.

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Public Law 114–246
114th Congress

An Act

To amend the Veterans’ Oral History Project Act to allow the collection of video and audio recordings of biographical histories by immediate family members of members of the Armed Forces who died as a result of their service during a period of war.

Nov. 28, 2016
[H.R. 4511]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Gold Star Families Voices Act”.

Gold Star
Families Voices
Act.
20 USC 2101
note.

SEC. 2. COLLECTION OF VIDEO AND AUDIO RECORDINGS OF BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORIES BY IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBERS OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WHO DIED AS A RESULT OF THEIR SERVICE DURING A PERIOD OF WAR.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Paragraph (1) of section 3(a) of the Veterans’ Oral History Project Act (20 U.S.C. 2142(a)(1)) is amended to read as follows:

“(1) to collect video and audio recordings of—

“(A) personal histories and testimonials of veterans of the Armed Forces who served during a period of war; and

“(B) biographical histories by immediate family members of members of the Armed Forces who became missing in action or died as a result of their service during a period of war;”.

(b) **CONFORMING AMENDMENT.**—Section 3 of the Veterans’ Oral History Project Act (20 U.S.C. 2142) is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(d) **DEFINITION OF IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBER.**—For purposes of subsection (a), the term ‘immediate family member’ means a parent, spouse, sibling, or child.”.

Approved November 28, 2016.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 4511:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 114–663 (Comm. on House Administration).
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 162 (2016):

Sept. 6, considered and
passed House. Nov. 15,
considered and passed
Senate.

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