

**REPORT: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**BY: JUDITH E. PEARSON, PH.D.**

**FOR: NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMANDERY OF THE NAVAL ORDER OF THE UNITED STATES**

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**PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the National Capital Commandery concerning the Library of Congress (LoC) Veterans History Project (VHP). The commandery Executive Committee (ExCom) has requested this information and will review it as a first step toward the goal of establishing a veterans' oral history initiative. This initiative, if pursued, will help the commandery to adhere to the Naval Order's mission to preserve the history of the US sea services. It will also be a way to capture, for posterity, the stories of some of our older companions: their accomplishments, achievements, and perspectives relevant to their military experience.

**ABOUT THE VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

The United States Congress created the Veterans History Project (VHP) in 2000 as part of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The VHP collects, preserves, and makes accessible the firsthand remembrances of U.S. military veterans from World War I through the more recent conflicts. Anyone, including students ages 15 or older, can volunteer to participate as an Interviewer.

The LoC maintains the VHP collection and its contents are available for research and education. Users can access the collection online (content is limited) and in person. The collection contains audio or video recordings of interviews with individual veterans, and/or 20 pages or more of original, unpublished memoirs, journals, or diaries, and/or 10 or more original photographs, letters, or two-dimensional art work. The VHP website, [loc.gov/vets](http://loc.gov/vets), displays a Biographical Information and Service History record for each veteran who contributes. This page includes the veteran's name, military service details and donor/interviewer affiliation. Some contributions include digitized content that is easily viewable online.

The VHP also accepts memoirs, diaries and photos of deceased veterans from family members as well as histories from members of Gold Star Families (families who have lost a service member to combat). It does not accept "three-dimensional" artefacts such as medals or uniforms.

**REQUIRED FORMS**

The VHP website provides a Field Kit (a downloadable PDF) containing instructions for Interviewers, as well as the necessary forms. Interviewers can also download the individual forms from the website. The required forms are:

- Biographical Data Form (completed by Veteran prior to interview)
- Veteran's Release Form (completed by Veteran prior to interview)
- Interviewer's Release From (completed by Interviewer prior to interview)
- Audio and Video Recording Log (completed by the Interviewer during the interview: minutes into the recording with each new topic)

- Photograph Log (Optional: a list of photos to be donated; completed by Interviewer with help from the Veteran)
- Manuscript Data Sheet (Optional: a list of materials to be donated; completed by the Interviewer with help from the Veteran)
- A Cover Letter to accompany the contribution (completed by the Interviewer upon delivering the completed interview and materials to the VHP)

The VHP provides an instructional video for interviewers at [Webcast: VHP Fieldkit Companion Video \(Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center\) \(loc.gov\)](#)

## **MEDIA REQUIREMENTS**

The Interviewer must complete a 30 minute (minimum) interview using a camcorder, tape recorder, or digital video or audio recording device. For video recordings, the VHP accepts cassettes, digital video (MiniDV, DVCAM, DVPRO), DVD-R, or USB drive format. Audio recordings are submitted as cassettes or in CD-R or USB drive format. Digital file types are WAV, MPEG2/MPG, MOV, or MPEG4/MP4. Mobile device recordings are acceptable, as long as the interview takes place in a quiet, indoor location.

The VHP website does not advise on whether it is suitable to conduct interviews by Zoom (which allows users to produce MP4 video/audio recordings of online meetings). Through a phone call and email exchanges, VHP representatives directed me to a VHP blog stating that such online recording should be “a last resort” due to possible technical issues and poor sound quality. The blog can be found here: [Conducting Virtual Oral History Interviews in Light of the Covid-19 Pandemic | Folklife Today \(loc.gov\)](#)

I also sent an email inquiring as to whether recorded interviews could be submitted for download via a large file web site such as Dropbox, but received no reply.

## **INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

The Field Guide and the VHP website give the steps for interview preparation, including an Interview Outline that lists sample questions and topics to discuss. Preparation includes completing the required forms, selecting and testing the recording device, preparing the questions, scheduling the interview, and ensuring that the interview location is quiet and free of distractions.

## **INTERVIEW REQUIREMENTS**

The Field Guide and the VHP website give guidance for conducting the interview.

- At the start of the interview, the Interviewer must state his/her name and organization affiliation, the Veteran’s full name, date, location, relationship to Interviewer (if any), names of other people present, and purpose of the interview.
- Next, the interviewer must ask the Veteran to provide biographical information such as name, date of birth, branch of service, highest rank, and war or conflict served.
- Then the Interviewer should ask questions about the Veteran’s early days of service, wartime service, experiences at the end of military service, and personal reflections.
- The Interviewer must ensure all the required forms are completed, including the Recording Log, the Photograph Log, and the Manuscript Data Sheet.

## **SUBMITTING THE INTERVIEW AND ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

The VHP requires that Interviewers submit unedited, original materials via a commercial carrier such as FedEx or UPS (use of the US Postal Service is prohibited). Sponsoring organizations are allowed to maintain a copy of the interview for their archive. The Cover Letter must accompany all submitted materials. The mailing address is:

Veterans History Project  
The Library of Congress  
101 Independence Ave  
SE Washington, DC 20540-4615

Interviewers can also hand deliver materials on weekdays between 9:30 am and 3:30 pm, by appointment: Call 202-707-4916. The address for hand deliveries is:

VHP Information Center  
The Library of Congress  
Jefferson Building  
Room LJ- G51  
101 Independence Ave  
SE Washington, D.C.

## **HOW THE VHP PROCESSES EACH CONTRIBUTION**

The VHP processes each contribution, taking up to eight months. The process includes review, acknowledgement via post card to Interviewer, data entry, archiving, and creation of an online record.

## **WHERE TO FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For more information about the VHP, use these methods of contact:

- Phone: 202-707-4916
- Toll Free Message Line: 1-888-371-5848
- Fax: 202-252-2046
- Email: [vohp@loc.gov](mailto:vohp@loc.gov)
- Website: [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vetshistoryproject/>
- Blog: <http://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/category/veterans-history-project/>
- RSS: <http://www.loc.gov/rss/vhp/vhp.xml>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMANDERY**

Based on the information supplied here, it is recommended that the National Capital Commandery proceed with its veterans' oral history initiative. The next steps are:

- The ExCom decides how many interviews to conduct in 2021.
- The ExCom selects one or more volunteer interviewers for 2021.
- The ExCom ensures the interviewer(s) has the proper recording equipment and becomes familiar with the VHP website, Field Guide, and required forms.
- The ExCom selects one or more veterans to interview (Admiral Sagerholm has volunteered).
- The Interviewer schedules the interview(s).
- The Interviewer completes the paperwork (see required forms, above).

- The Interviewer conducts the interview while maintaining the recording log.
- The Interviewer saves the interview in an acceptable format (with an extra copy for archiving).
- The Interviewer submits the interview, cover letter, and any accompanying materials to VHP.
- Optional: The Interviewer or another companion presents the interview process at the NOUS Congress or write an article about the interview process for the NOUS national magazine.
- If the project is successful, repeat for future years.

Respectfully submitted by Judith E. Pearson, Ph.D.