

## **Getting Started: A Guide to the *Discovering Oral Histories of the Vietnam Era Project***

### **What is oral history and how is it a useful tool in historical study?**

Oral history, according to the National Oral History Society is “the recording of people’s memories. It is the living history of everyone’s life experiences.” The key word *oral* refers to the interactive processes of a personal interview in which historians record by audio or video the memories of an individual in relation to a particular time, place, and/or event. Oral historians are particularly interested in the stories of common people often missed by conventional history books.

Oral histories are an important tool in the study of history because they add a more personal and human dimension not typically found in textbooks. As primary sources, the strength in the oral history is the authenticity of the human experience emanating from memory and free secondary summation or editing.

For more specific information reference the following websites:

<http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/>

<http://omega.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/>

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/>

### **Where can you find completed oral histories to examine and reference?**

You may find collections of completed oral histories on the UWGB Area Research Center on the third floor of the Cofrin Library, the local veterans association, the Manitowoc and Appleton Veterans chapters, and Reference Sheet D.

### **Who is an appropriate interviewee and where can they be found?**

Basically, anyone who was alive during the Vietnam War Era and is willing to talk about their experiences is a viable oral history candidate. Your family is a convenient resource—parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins etc. may be more than willing to cooperate. Please do not limit your search to vets exclusively. Although they are a rich source, there are many other individuals whose experiences are equally relevant and interesting. For those of you completing the military stakeholders, with the interviewing of vets, please tap into their families as well (e.g. mothers, fathers, spouses, children). Also look to Reference Sheets A and B to find organizations that may put you in contact with possible interviewees.

### **What is the process for conducting an oral history interview?**

Please review Reference Sheet C and or the corresponding website

[www.pbs.org/pov/stories/vietnam/curriculum.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/stories/vietnam/curriculum.html) and Cynthia Stokes Brown’s book [Like It Was: A Complete Guide to Writing Oral History](#).