



Who Is the Veteran in Your Life?

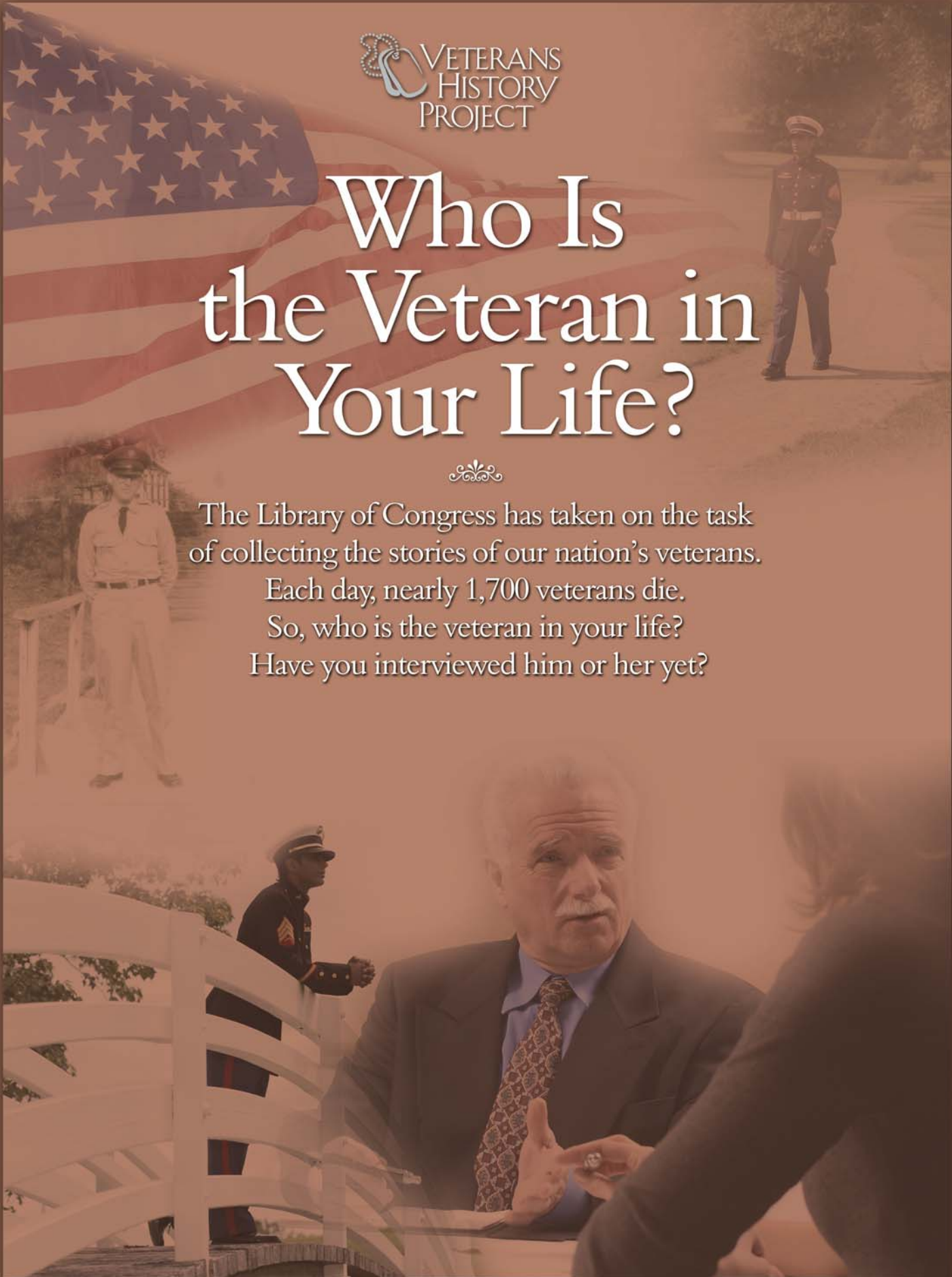


The Library of Congress has taken on the task
of collecting the stories of our nation's veterans.

Each day, nearly 1,700 veterans die.

So, who is the veteran in your life?

Have you interviewed him or her yet?



“Who is the veteran in your life?” retired Col. Robert “Bob” Patrick asks me. He is the director of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

Smiling, I tell him my father, Army Specialist Fourth Class Stanley Norman Cooper, is mine. He served during the infancy of the Vietnam War; like many veterans, the details of his story have been few and far between.

“Have you interviewed him yet?” Patrick inquires.

Patrick is understandably passionate about the VHP. His mission is to spread the word that 1,700 of our veterans die every day. And he doesn’t want their stories to die with them.

Since 2003, NCRA members have transcribed approximately 1,300 veterans’ stories, and 75 members have actually conducted and transcribed interviews of the veterans in their lives. Patrick says that VHP’s partnership with the National Court Reporter Foundation is a “natural fit,” and he is grateful to NCRA members who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to be “guardians of the record” for our nation’s veterans.

MY FATHER’S STORY



The author’s father, Vietnam veteran Stanley Norman Cooper, U.S. Army 69th Signal Battalion, February 1964

After preparing my questions and reviewing VHP interview tips and resources at www.loc.gov/vets/moreresources.html#tips, I start the interview. My father begins to reminisce. He smiles as he recounts his time in teletype school at Fort Gordon, Ga.; how the mess hall food was a welcome change from his mother’s bad cooking; and how he wrote love letters to my mother every day.

He recalls sailing the Pacific Ocean for 22 days aboard the *USNS Upshur* in 1965. When his unit landed in Vietnam a month early, the young soldiers were ordered to “rough it.” Their assigned location in Ben Wa had not yet been cleared by Army engineers, so the soldiers were ordered to pitch their pup tents. After shelter was secured, the officers nixed the tent city erected at the top of a hill and ordered the tents be moved to the bottom of the hill. The officers, of course, belonged at the top. Following their basic training, my father and his army buddies dug trenches around each tent to protect them from rain. The officers, however, didn’t heed the Army’s sound advice. My father laughed as he recounted watching his superiors floating on mattresses down the hill during — they learned later — monsoon season.

During the 1965 Christmas season, my father was sent on temporary duty assignment to the Tan Son Nhut Air Base to work in the post office — a job he did as a civilian. He would work 12 hours one day and would ride a free bus to Saigon the

next day. “It seemed like every day I wasn’t in Saigon, the Viet Cong would attack the USO or the NCO Club.” Thankfully, my father left Vietnam unscathed.

REPORTERS USE SKILLS TO CAPTURE WAR STORIES

The veteran in reporter Candace H. Reed’s life is her father, 81-year-old Robert Elton Hill. As a World War II Navy veteran, he was responsible for dropping troops and supplies and, later, for picking up dead and wounded soldiers from the beaches. Reed, who is a CRI and CPE, and her sister-in-law, Sherry Hill, orchestrated a career day and open house at Alabama’s Prince Institute of Professional Studies, Inc., in Montgomery. On November 7, 2007, area veterans were interviewed and high-speed reporting students honed their skills. Reed, assistant director of Prince Institute, captured her father’s war-time history on her steno machine, while Hill, director of admissions, conducted the interview. They had a fantastic turnout that day, captioning the histories of a dozen war veterans, so they hosted yet another VHP Day on December 7, 2007.



Robert Hill, 81-year-old WWII Navy Veteran, Nov. 7, 2007

NCRA President-Elect Karen Yates, CRR, CCP, CBC, has three veterans in her life: her uncles Paul Pettipas, Frederick Goeke, and Richard Goeke. Yates’s family ties motivated her involvement in VHP, when she initially transcribed two audio interviews. Next, she interviewed her uncles, who all served during World War II.

At the Nevada Court Reporters Association annual convention, Yates encouraged more reporters to get involved. She demonstrated to the crowd how to conduct a veteran interview as she questioned Ernest and Everett Steadman, 82-year-old twin brothers.

“There are many ways that court reporters can use their skills to help the community, but none as entertaining, heart-warming, and educational as working on VHP. It was so easy — both the simple transcribing, using easy-to-follow formatting instructions, and doing the interviews,” said Yates.

The veteran in Tami Smith’s life was her father, Buck Sergeant R. Wayne Cowles. The World War II veteran admitted to his daughter countless times how he ran and hid in the woods the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Unfortunately, Cowles died just as the Veterans History Project was ramping up. “It really struck my heart,” said Smith. Participating in this history-preserving program was very bittersweet.

In addition to transcribing the stories of two World War II veterans, Smith, RPR, CPE, turned her attention to her local veterans. She represented NCRA and the Michigan Association of Professional Court Reporters on March 14, 2006, in a salute to Michigan Veterans at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center. Also in attendance were Dr. James Billington, the Librarian of Congress; Col. Patrick, director of the VHP; Brig.

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Gen. Donald Scott, deputy librarian of Congress; Michael Wheeler, director of the VHP Center; and four Michigan reporters: Marilyn Dillard, Patricia Hyland, Matthew Dreger, and Richard Smith. The four other reporters represented NCRA and the Michigan Association of Professional Court Reporters.

During the ceremony Tom Weiner, the VHP historian and author of *Forever a Soldier* and *Voices of War*, presented his interview of Charles Remsburg, a World War II veteran (his memoirs can be read at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/8275>). As Smith listened to the veteran's interview, she was "struck again by how these brave men and women went off to a strange place for months or years at a time, not really knowing if they would ever come home again. And they did it, seemingly without question, because they felt it was their duty." Smith feels her involvement in VHP was extremely rewarding, and she continues to encourage others to participate.

A WIN-WIN FOR EVERYONE

Since 2004 Virginia Dodge, CRR, an independent deposition reporter, has racked up the CEUs. To date, she has transcribed 20 interviews for



(Listed from left to right) Dr. James Billington, Librarian of Congress; Tami Smith, RPR, CPE; Patricia Hyland, RPR; Matthew Dreger; Marilyn Dillard, RPR, on March 14, 2006.

VHP. "Some of the veterans are born storytellers, and others need the details coaxed out of them ... much like depositions we've probably all witnessed," says Dodge. She has transcribed the war stories of a front-line infantryman, a chaplain, and a Pearl Harbor Day switchboard operator; she's heard it all.

"I enjoy the humorous bits," Dodge

TIPS FOR CONDUCTING YOUR VETERAN'S INTERVIEW

- Work on your follow-through. Virginia Dodge, CRR, has transcribed 20 interviews to date. She states that interviewers "don't always follow up on the parts of the story I want to hear more about, so I'm left hanging."
- Conduct a pre-interview with your veteran.
- Do not use extended-time speeds on recorders.
- Do not use microcassettes.
- For more VHP interview tips and resources, visit www.loc.gov/vets/moresources.html#tips.

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- The recommended turnaround time for transcribing audio recordings is two to three weeks.
- VHP accepts firsthand accounts of veterans and civilian military supporters from present-day conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq back to World War I.
- VHP cannot collect 3D artifacts, such as medals, canteens, dog tags, helmets, and uniforms.
- Getting involved is easy. Go to <http://NCRAonline.org/Foundation/Vets/> to sign up online, or contact Beth Kilker at bkilker@ncrahq.org or 800-272-6272 for more information.
- Court reporters can earn .1 CEU for each tape transcribed, with a maximum of 1 CEU for a three-year period. NCRF will pay NCRA student membership dues for one year for students who transcribe two tapes or CDs through the Foundation's Oral Histories Program.

said, "and find it interesting to hear how people spent leave, the food they ate, the makeshift ways they found to celebrate Christmas."

Dodge was surprised that during World War II, our servicemen were sometimes left to fend for themselves. While on leave overseas or recovering from war injuries, our nation's heroes resorted to hitchhiking or using their own resources to report back to duty. Dodge transcribed Stanley Slusark's story, where he recounted seeing Mussolini's corpse hanging by the heels outside a gas station. Mussolini's mistress, Clara Petacci, morbidly hung next to him.

"Those taken prisoner tend to focus on the comical or absurd things that happened to them, rather than the despair, pain, or suffering," shared Dodge. She listened to Louis Spitzfaden recount his bomb-disposal squad graduation. He received a bottle of hair dye and a cork inside a brown paper bag as a gift.

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress does more than archive VHP transcripts; it also houses tens of thousands of preserved personal letters and diaries, maps, photos, Web

presentations, and autobiographies pecked out on old typewriters. If you cannot physically come to the American Folklife Center, at the click of your mouse, you can access Web pages that are devoted to every veteran. Profiles from current-day conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq back to World War I make up the database. To date, approximately 8 percent (4,480) of the 55,000 submissions have been digitized. Dodge says, "I have seen one of my transcripts featured on the Web site, and it gave me a little thrill, even though I'm anonymous."

When I asked my father to participate in the VHP, he initially sidestepped my request. Because he spent only 10 weeks in Vietnam, my father, like so many of our veterans, didn't acknowledge the importance of his service. But his service and commitment to his country mean something. The VHP gives him license to remember — just as it gives all servicemen and women who served a license to remember.

So now I ask you, Who is the veteran in your life? Have you interviewed him or her yet? Col. Patrick looks forward to hearing from you soon. ■