

2005 POGUE AWARD GOES TO ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

On March 18, OHMAR presented its 2005 Forrest C. Pogue Award to the Army Corps of Engineers Oral History Program. The project, which dates back to 1957, was recognized for the outstanding body of information it has collected, through the use of well-trained oral historians both in-house and on contract.

Accepting the Pogue award was Dr. Paul Walker, Chief, Office of History, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Walker received a bachelor's degree in American Thought and Civilization from The George Washington University in 1967 and started graduate work at the University of North Carolina. Having selected the development of Baltimore in the American Revolution as the topic for his dissertation, he moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where he also began teaching part-time at Towson State University. In 1973 he received a Ph.D. in American History. After several years as a contractor with the Corps of Engineers, he joined the Corps' Historical Division (later Office of History) in 1978.

Portions of an interview with Dr. Walker, conducted by OHMAR past-president Donita Moorhus, appear below. For the full interview, go to: www.ohmar.org

Moorhus: How did you get into oral history?

Walker: A notice came to Towson State from the then-Historical Division of the Office of Chief of Engineers, which was located in Baltimore at that time. This announcement was for a history of what was known as the Susquehanna Engineer District and Tropical Storm Agnes. I went down and had an interview, and I was hired. I had never heard of the Corps of Engineers. I had very little knowledge of the military. But I got the contract.

I did a lot of interviews. I did them with General Groves, the district engineer, the deputies, and I did them with some of the major civilian folks. It was a team thing where some people in Baltimore District and some people in Philadelphia District, and probably some in New York, all helped, but there was this separate entity, the Susquehanna District. I tried to interview people at all those levels and to look at documents. Because it wasn't that long after the event, there still were a lot of documents available.



OHMAR Past President Donita Moorhus presenting the Forrest C. Pogue Award to Paul Walker, who accepted it on behalf of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Office of History.

I went all over the place. It was a real interesting project and very challenging, because like I said, I was learning about the Corps on the job

I became the director of the oral history program in the office. Most of the historians in the office were expected to do oral histories as part of their job. We were expected to use oral history in our research projects for source material. We were expected to do career oral history interviews. I think we quickly realized the value of doing oral history interviews, and were encouraged by the fact that it was part of what we were expected to do. I don't think that oral history was being too widely done in the Army. There was the officer interview program at the War College. But I would say in the other major commands, as far as history offices, they weren't doing a whole lot of oral history. And we became known for doing oral history.

Moorhus: You continued to use contractors then for oral history, even though you were requiring all of the staff to do oral history interviews?

Walker: We did. Initially we were doing more interviews in-house and fewer on contract. Over the years it's become the reverse of that for in-depth interviews. But the interviews that we're doing now, like as part of our coverage of the current Global War on Terrorism, are almost entirely in-house.

(continued on next page)

The **Forrest C. Pogue Award** is named for the military historian Dr. Forrest C. Pogue (1912-1996) who pioneered the use of oral history interviews to compile battlefield histories. Pogue taught for several years before joining the historical section of the United States Army during World War II. He later was appointed director of the George C. Marshall Research Center and then directed the Marshall Library and Marshall Research Foundation. In 1974, he was named director of the newly established Eisenhower Institute for Military Research at the Smithsonian and continued in that position until his retirement in 1986.

In the beginning of the '80s, we beefed up what we call the field history program. We did it with virtually no professional historians on staff in the field. We had to devise a regulation for the program that would recognize that the program would be implemented by non-historians and largely use contractors. But oral history was always a component of that program.

Moorhus: Your office is moving toward digital recording?

Walker: Definitely. About two years ago, our current program director, John Lonquest, moved us in the direction of using digital equipment. It really has a lot of advantages in terms of what you can do with it. The actual recording, as opposed to the transcript, can become more a center of focus. You can use it more effectively, because it's a better technology and it produces better results. You can take clips from the digital and incorporate them into other presentations. It's easier to do, and it's better quality.

Moorhus: What are some of the other changes that have taken place in the oral history program over the years?

Walker: I was selected as the chief historian in February 1989. I had a meeting with the Deputy Chief [of Engineers] at the time. His guidance to me included the statement that, "We want the History Office to sustain and become more involved in dealing with present-day activities of the Corps." We took that to heart and now really use oral history as part of our attempt to document and interpret current activities that the Corps is engaged in.

Another thing that was new goes back to when I took over this position. General Hank Hatch, who was Chief of Engineers in 1989, said, "I don't want to wait until my last week as Chief and do an interview on my four years as Chief. I want you to interview me while I'm Chief." So, starting with Hatch and continuing with all of his successors, I have done a series of interviews ranging from eight to twelve sessions over four years, averaging probably two hours each. It presents its own set of real challenges because when you're interviewing somebody while things are happening, it's a whole different thing. It's the immediacy versus doing it several years later. We do send it

back to them and let them edit it and particularly make additions to it. That would start to give it a reflective aspect. But we always maintain the original document, both the original tape, which is never altered, and the original transcript. So you've got the immediate, and then you can see what was added.

Since 2001, the Global War on Terrorism, the response to September 11th, we have really been engaged in doing interviews intentionally, within a fairly short period of time from when the person was involved. We've done over 300 in the last four years—interviews with participants in September 11th and the response, in the invasion of Iraq, before that Afghanistan, and then everything that's been going on since the "end of hostilities" and the reconstruction period, which has been a big mission for the Corps of Engineers.

There are other interesting things that have happened. In these kinds of contingency operations, records are not kept or they're not managed in terms of any kind of records management system. They may be there, but when you look at the volume of stuff that we get—the number of gigabytes if you just take everything that's there, and you sort of have to because it's not organized—it becomes a real challenge of dealing with that amount of documentation. Then some of it is lost. Some of it is not available. So, interviewing takes on a real added importance or value in the whole process.

That has been really seen in our work in Iraq. We sent John Lonquest and Eric Reinert from the staff over to Iraq, and they did a combination of interviewing and document downloading. The people become advocates in the process of interviewing. If you just show up and say you want to see their papers, you are going to have mixed reactions to that. But if you conduct an interview, you develop a rapport, an understanding of why you're doing this and what you plan to do with things, suddenly you get access to people and information that you wouldn't have otherwise.

I think the oral history becomes a real valuable tool in responding to what our command wants us to do. In Iraq, for example, John and Eric came home and were conducting more interviews back here. They noticed that certain patterns emerged from the interviews. Nobody else had their perspective, that overview. They

began to notice certain trends or certain subjects that came up over and over again, and analyzed that. One of the things that they focused on was what people were saying about the training that they had received before they were sent to Iraq or Afghanistan. There were a lot of problems with the training that they were getting for various reasons. So the historians took the initiative, and they made a presentation to several of the headquarters people in an open forum. As a result of that, really almost directly, there was a change made in the training that was being provided people to meet the shortcomings, the issues, that people were having. It wasn't instant, but it was a very fast incorporation of things that were gained from the oral history process into decision-making and policy for what is now our number one mission. That was really powerful.

I think we're trying to be as innovative as we can in using oral history in other ways. One example might be a forthcoming publication we have on the Korean War that's utilizing excerpts from oral histories and combining that with photos and having it laid out in such a way that the layout is also a major part of the telling of the story.

Technology is going to continue to change. It's the

change in the medium, from reel-to-reel to cassettes to digital. That's one piece of the technology story. But also, as we get more and more into people doing e-mail, the materials that we're dealing with are part of the technological change. So oral history takes on maybe new, different roles as a component of dealing with the electronic age, where huge volumes of material result, combined with cutbacks in records management.

Another thing that I would like to see us looking at more is how to make the contents of our huge collection of interviews more accessible and useable. The technology is there to do it. It's just a matter of devoting the resources. There's a lot of talk about knowledgeable management and knowledge transfer with the changeover in the workforce. More than 50 percent of the federal workforce—and it's true in the Corps of Engineers, in particular—supposedly is eligible to retire. We're going to have this mass exodus of knowledge. How do we deal with that? I think oral history can play a part in that.

Moorhous: Thank you for your time, and again, congratulations on receiving the Pogue Award. ■

NEWS FROM THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION *continued from page 1*

NEW JERSEY

Monmouth University professor Susan Douglass has assigned her oral history class a project that will study WWII and the heritage of the Italian-American community in New Jersey. Little has been done to record the memories of Italian-Americans at home and abroad during this time of war.

Interviewees must have been ten years or older in 1941, when the United States entered World War II. Additionally, they must have served in the U.S. Army or U.S. Navy during the war; or have lived in New Jersey during the war; or have lived in Italy during the war. Each person who participates will get a copy of their interview for their family records.

Anyone interested in participating, or anyone knowing someone who might wish to participate, should contact Professor Douglass

at sdouglas@mondec.monmouth.edu, or 732-263-5509.

MARYLAND

Harriet Lynn, producer and artistic director of Heritage Theater Artists Consortium, has received a grant from the city of Baltimore to conduct an oral history project—"Life Stories"—that will collect oral histories of senior adults who gather weekly at the Ivy Center Eating Together Program in West Baltimore and then incorporate them into a performance work to be presented by the participants themselves at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African-American History and Culture, and at various other community venues. Both a publication and a documentary film based on this oral history material will be produced. The program is intended to both celebrate and document the heritage and culture of the participants, utilizing the visual, oral,

written and performing arts. Performances are planned for late 2005. For further information, contact Harriet Lynn at hlynn@h-t-a-c.com, or 410-235-4457.

PENNSYLVANIA

Dr. Chad Kimmel, of Shippensburg University, was recently awarded a FPDC grant to continue his study of Levittown, Pennsylvania, a mass-produced suburban community, now 53 years old. Along with two department majors, Rachel Marks and Chris Ottey, Dr. Kimmel is recording and preserving the stories and memories of those who built Levittown. Oral history interviews explore five content areas: work conditions, incentive pay and other motivating factors; organization of labor; division of labor; and social/psychological factors. The project will continue through the fall of 2005. For further information, contact Dr. Kimmel at cmkimm@ship.edu. ■