

### Summer internship 2021: Haralson County Veterans Association.

For the summer of 2021, I worked with the Haralson County Veterans Association. During my internship, I worked for Mr. Ely Elefante and was tasked with conducting interviews with local veterans and members of the association. The information gathered in these interviews is going to be used in Mr. Elefante's book entitled *The History of the Haralson County Veterans Association*. I worked 150 hours to complete the tasks I was assigned. From these tasks, I learned three key things that we are focused on in the community, the field of Public History, and myself as an emerging Public Historian.

The key thing that I learned was the important role that the Veterans Association plays in the Haralson County community. The association impacted the community in a variety of different ways whether it was through the programs they held, the various services they offered their veterans, or through honoring the veterans who have lost their lives or are still living through the creation of the veteran's memorial park. The veteran's association holds one big event every year as well as a few smaller ones. The biggest event that the association holds is the fourth of July celebration. During the celebration, the veterans host different speakers to come and speak. Each year they have a different theme this year they were honoring first responders for their service during the covid 19 pandemic. After the speaking event is over the festivities continue with a parade followed by fireworks that evening. The smaller events that the association holds include a motorbike ride and a veterans day program. The association also provides numerous services for the county's veterans, both living and deceased. For the living veterans, the association helps with getting them VA benefits as well as any other

medical or financial assistance that they may require. In the early days of the association, several of the members would drive veterans to Atlanta to get them to the VA. For the deceased veterans, the association will come to their funeral and do honors such as playing taps, flag folding, and a rifle salute. In recent years they have taken up grave restoration projects. Several members of the group go in and will clean and restore the grave of the veteran to like-new condition. The other service that the veterans provided to the community was the installation and upkeep of the two veteran's parks in the city of Tallapoosa. The first park that the veterans installed was the League and Lowe Park that is in the center of the city. I found in my interviews with many of the veterans that were involved with the installation of the park that they found working on the park to be a healing process. At the time of the construction of the park, many of the men involved had only been back from Vietnam for a few years and we are still working through the trauma that was incurred during the war. Many saw working in the park as a way of honoring those that never returned home. Many of the veterans that I interviewed got emotional when talking about what working in the park meant to them. The Park itself was built in two phases. The first phase was completed in the 1960s and the second phase was completed in 2001. When the second half of the park was built the Association had to purchase the adjacent land using their own homes and belongings as collateral. The Park was dedicated to three young men who lost their lives in Vietnam. They were Mr. Barry League, Mr. Jerome Lowe, and Mr. Ray McKibben. The Park also includes a memorial to the women that fought and served in various wars. The other park that the association upkeeps is Helton Howland Park. This Park features

many different types of airplanes, tanks, and helicopters models that were used in Vietnam.

From the internship, I learned many key things about the field of public history. One of the first key things that I learned was the value of flexibility. When conducting and scheduling interviews I learned that you must be flexible with the times that you meet people. They are giving you part of their day to be interviewed and you need to be respectful of their time. But on the other hand, you are also giving part of your day to collect their stories. When I would schedule my interviews, I would make sure to schedule them at a time that would work for me as well as the interviewees. I also learned you must be flexible when it comes to interviewees being late or not showing up for the interview. When it comes to this, I would stay at the agreed meeting place for around 45 mins so that I gave them ample time to get there. I would then call the next day and reschedule the interview. Another aspect that I learned was how to properly conduct oral histories. I learned that the first step to conducting an oral history is to write up interview questions. These questions need to be open-ended and not be able to be answered with a yes or a no. I also learned to then prioritize the order that you conduct the interviews. So, having the interviews that are integral to your project first and then having the second most important next followed by everyone else that you want to interview. After you have an order sent to your interview it is time to start. When interviewing uses the questions that you developed as a launching off point. Do not be afraid to explore a topic more thoroughly. The last thing that I learned about the field of public history is that of time management. During this internship, time management has been important since I am doing the internship virtually. I had to

make sure that I set time aside to work on my internship as well as my GRA and be available for family. This was something that I struggled with during the first part of my internship it was not until the latter that I got in a groove and was able to get a lot accomplished. This has taught me that I need to go into projects with a plan of how to get things done on time.

Overall, I enjoyed my internship and the people that I worked with were friendly. The association itself seems to be doing its best with what it has. There were times when I wished I could have helped the members to preserve some of the pictures and documents that they have. I think what the association is doing is great for the community. I do wish that I had had more guidance from my sponsor when it came to the interviews. I at times felt like I was in a way on my own. I do wish that I could have met him in person at least once so that I would have the chance to connect with him. It is hard to learn what someone is like through email and google meet. I do worry about the museum that the association plans to open. They are not fully aware of what it entails to run and successful museum. Many say that they have different items that they want to put into the museum. I do worry about how those items will be stored and curated. Only time will tell what will come of this museum.

I had many memorable experiences during my internship but the one that stands out to me the most would have to be my interview with Mr. Randy Bentley. Mr. Bentley was a Vietnam veteran that saw action during the war. He told me about many different stories from his time in the service. One of the stories Bentley tells of is the time that he almost died in Vietnam. Bentley and a young man named Bailey had orders to hold a bridge on one side of an island in Vietnam. The other side of the island was being

guarded by the South Vietnamese. He and Bailey were told to hold the bridge for as long as they could then run. Bentley decided that he was not going to run when he told this Bailey he also decided to stay as well. So, they left the bunker they were in to hold the bridge. Bentley said during that time he was praying to God asking him to allow him to live to see the morning. Then he says that the North Vietnamese then turned around and left them. This story was memorable to me because Mr. Bentley trusted me enough to tell me that story that he had told very few other people.

During my internship, I also learned many things about myself as a public historian. I learned that I love to conduct interviews and hear other people's stories. To me, there is some aspect of oral history that you do not get when you read about the same events in a book. I loved to be able to sit down and hear others' stories and get experience the parts of history that they got to live through. This is something that I would like to be able to continue in my career as a public historian.

I learned many different things about the Haralson County community, the field of public history, and myself as a public historian through this experience. I hope to be able to see the book that my interview that I conducted came to be a part of.