The Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at CCSU unveiled one of its newest projects at a luncheon on November 21, 2005 to dedicate the Veterans History Project (VHP) at CCSU. In September, 2005 CPPSR became both a participating partner and an archive partner with the U.S. Library of Congress in its Veterans History Project. As a partner, the Center collects and preserves oral histories of Connecticut veterans. The videotaped interviews will be archived in the Special Collections at CCSU’s Elihu Burritt Library, which is open to the public and ensures that not only students and scholars will have access to this historic collection, but veterans, their families and interested citizens will also have the opportunity to view these interviews and historic records. Copies of related materials provided by the veterans such as service records, photographs, journals, field maps, drawings, etc. will also be digitized and archived in the Special Collections.

In attendance at the dedication were: (clockwise) CCSU student Judith Houpert, Commissioner Linda Schwartz, Tuskegee Airman Connie Nappier, Jr. and WWII veterans John and Gladys Donovan.

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The Veterans History Project was created in 2000, when the U.S. Congress voted unanimously to preserve and archive the oral histories of men and women who have served in any of our country’s wars or any civilian who supported the war effort. The project, housed at the U. S. Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and now also at CCSU, collects and archives the taped interviews, photographs and documents of veterans from:

* World War I (1914-1920)
* World War II (1939-1946)
* Korean War (1950-1955)
* Vietnam War (1961-1975)
* Persian Gulf War (1990-1995)
* Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts (2001-present)

There are more than 310,000 Connecticut veterans. (12% of the state’s population)

- More than 81,000 served in WWII.
- More than 49,000 served in Korea.
- More than 91,000 served in Vietnam.
- More than 21,000 served in the first Persian Gulf War.

Establishing the VHP at CCSU is of great academic and historic importance for the University, New Britain and the state of Connecticut. The past comes alive for CCSU students as they expand their classroom knowledge and go into the field to interview the men and women who made history. Students in Dr. John Tully’s “History of American Foreign Relations, 1895 to present” and Professor John Mueller’s “War & Oral History” classes had the opportunity to do just that this year. Each of Dr. Tully’s students interviewed a veteran of the Greatest Generation (WWII era), while Professor Mueller’s students selected veterans from any of our country’s wars. All of the taped interviews will be archived in the CCSU Library’s Special Collections. Many of the students attended the VHP dedication ceremony accompanied by the veterans they interviewed. Students spoke of the impact it made on them personally to learn history from those who experienced it first hand, to hear the individual stories of ordinary men and women who were actually “there” when the history the students were studying in the classroom was being made.

DEDICATION OF THE VHP CONTINUED

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The luncheon, organized by CPPSR to honor and thank Connecticut veterans who have participated in this historic endeavor, was attended by more than 150 guests. Veterans from WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the war in Iraq attended, many accompanied by proud family members. These Connecticut heroes have served in combat across the world in places such as Guadalcanal, Anzio, Okinawa, Tarawa, the Philippines, Guam, Kwajalein, Italy, Da Nang, Saigon, and Khe Sahn amongst many others. Others flew bombing missions over Germany and Korea. One was held as a prisoner of war after his plane was shot down. The oldest veteran attending was Katherine Leahy, a 93-year-old Navy nurse who was among the first Americans who arrived on Guam to set up Fleet Hospital 111, which received the first casualties from the Iwo Jima and Okinawa campaigns.

Local and state dignitaries on hand to express appreciation for the sacrifice and service of these veterans, included Congresswoman Nancy Johnson, Congressman John Larson, Mayor Timothy Stewart, Governor and Mrs. William O’Neill, and VA Commissioner Linda Schwartz. Both former Governor O’Neill (an aerial gunner in the Korean War) and Commissioner Schwartz (a hospital and flight nurse during the Vietnam War) participated in the project and have shared their personal stories of their military experience in their interviews.

Happy Fourth of July!!

With gratitude and appreciation to the veterans who have participated in the VHP and were willing to share their individual war experiences.
Ms. Evelyn Green has been hired to catalog and archive the veterans’ records, diaries, maps and photographs and to create a finding aid.

The first 60 interviews are presently being digitized and cataloged with the long-term goal of eventually making all the interviews and documents available on the internet.

The Association for the Study of Connecticut History granted space in their semi-annual Connecticut History Journal to print a column, “Voices of Connecticut Veterans.” Twice a year we will highlight the life and story of one of the Connecticut veterans. Three WWII veterans, Steven Stupak, Willie James Macon, and Donald Moss have been featured to date.

CPPSR will collaborate with the History Department to develop a complementary oral history project exploring civilian perspectives during America’s conflicts.

A VHP at CCSU web-site is under construction.