On March 31, 2012, Connecticut honored and thanked our state's Vietnam veterans at the William A. O'Neill Armory in Hartford. The Veterans History Project at CCSU partnered with the CT Department of Veterans' Affairs to sponsor the event. In May, 2010, Connecticut became the second state in the nation to pass legislation designating March 30th as Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. The homecoming was planned in order to give Vietnam veterans the welcome home they never received. A capacity crowd of veterans, family members and friends who came to show their appreciation filled the armory. After opening remarks from Governor Dannel Malloy, Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman, Congressman John Larson, and General William Begert (U.S. Air Force, Retired) guests were treated to an evening of entertainment headlined by the USO (United Service Organization) Liberty Bells. DJ "Mark the Shark" played Vietnam era music off the bed of Mike Rogalsky's restored "deuce and a half," authentic veteran Red Cross donut dollies who served "in-country" played games with the troops, and CCSU students read from essays written about Vietnam veterans. While the military truck took center stage inside the Armory, the main attraction outside was Andrew Knapp's UH-1M "Huey" helicopter gunship, itself a veteran of the Vietnam War. Christopher Wood (U.S. Coast Guard, Retired) was excited to see this icon of Vietnam service. Although he had, “ridden in Hueys before, [he’d] never gotten to sit in the pilot’s seat.”

Among the diverse audience, veterans from World War II through the present expressed their gratitude to Vietnam era comrades, which included a contingent of Laotian and Hmong allies. With the thanks of friends, family and supporters, this evening stood in stark contrast to the initial homecoming experience. An example for generations to follow, this warrior’s welcome, stated David Tazzara (U.S. Army, retired) was an “honorable thing to have … better late than never!”
At the age of 17, Jerry P. Winn enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. Two years later, the young corporal was in Vietnam leading “sweep and clear” patrols through the An Hoa province. As a pointman, Winn often guided these searches for hostile arms and combatants. During an operation on January 9th, 1970, the young marine had a "bad feeling." Strewn around him were “Chu Hoi” propaganda leaflets. Unsettled, he signaled the column, and warned them back - just in time, as his next step triggered a booby trap. Jerry can still remember hearing his own scream as he was blown through the air.

Due to the severity of his injuries, including lost fingers and shrapnel wounds, Winn was immediately medevaced to Da Nang, then on to a hospital in Japan. Upon returning to the United States, he was treated at St. Albans Hospital in Queens, New York and was eventually discharged. Winn’s life was spared and his injuries would heal, yet something was missing: his medals. Due to his abrupt departure from the battlefield and successive hospitalizations, his rightfully earned commendations fell through the cracks.

In July of 2011, Winn was interviewed for the CCSU Veterans History Project. When Director Eileen Hurst discovered that Winn never received his medals, she contacted Congressman John Larson and his staff to see if the oversight could be rectified. Larson's office approached the Marine Corps directly, who ultimately provided the US medals that Jerry earned. Ms. Hurst, Congressman Larson, Commissioner Linda Schwartz, and Winn’s friends and family gathered at the Winsted Veterans of Foreign Wars hall for an award ceremony on April 2, 2012. Winn finally received the awards he earned 42 years ago. In addition, Commissioner Schwartz bestowed upon Winn a Connecticut Wartime Service Medal. Winn commented, "42 years later, who would have thunk it?"

FRANCE KNIGHTS LOCAL LIBERATORS

For World War II service in the European Theatre of Operations, the French government recently bestowed the honor of “Chevalier” upon Joseph Borriello and Morton Katz. With origins that date back to Napoleon Bonaparte, this award recognizes soldiers and civilians alike for their personal contributions to France and its people. By assisting the restoration of a Free French government, these Connecticut veterans earned the title of “Knight of the French Legion of Honor.”

Both were enlisted men in the U. S. Army; Borriello as an engineer with the 3rd Infantry Division and Katz as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division. Both directly participated in the liberation of France. In addition to this recent tribute, both of these veterans fought in distinguished combat units and were decorated with the Presidential Unit Citation.

EVER WONDER WHERE YOUR INTERVIEW GOES?

Stay tuned for the fall 2012 issue of the Veterans History Project newsletter to get an inside look into the archives and reading room of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.
On December 1, 2011, thirteen servicemen previously interviewed by the Veterans History Project were among the twenty veterans who attended a military forum at Rocky Hill High School. The lecturers spanned three generations of military service, with experiences ranging from the vicious air combat over Nazi-occupied Europe, to the humid jungle firefights in Pleiku, and on to the arid mountain combat of present day warriors. Despite this broad generational gap, their common thread of military experiences resonated among a generation of students who reached maturity amidst two American wars. In this heightened climate of military awareness, veterans were able to share their experiences with an audience attuned to the nature of war.

Comprised of Connecticut veterans, these speakers offered community memories of military service. Akin to small forums, many of the veterans were assigned to individual classrooms, where they were able to discuss their wartime experiences in home rooms of fifteen to twenty students.

As veterans revisited these memories, they also entertained questions from the Rocky Hill students. During one emotional session, two Vietnam veterans described their tours of duty in “in country” with the Army and Marine Corps respectively. Sharing original photographs and wartime memorabilia, the students were exposed, perhaps for the first time, to an intimate perspective of modern warfare.

Professor Mary Collins and her Advanced Creative Nonfiction Workshop seminar worked with veterans this semester to write and publish "In Country and Back: Essays and Reflections by Vietnam Veterans and CCSU Students." Students interviewed Connecticut Vietnam veterans and cooperatively wrote essays about their military experiences. Despite this generational gap, students empathized with these Vietnam veterans. Many of them spent their early adulthood in Vietnam, rather than the classroom. In the case of Ron Farina, however, the project allowed him to discuss his own experiences with another Vietnam veteran.

Farina, a CCSU student during the Vietnam war, enlisted in the Marine Corps after his Freshman year. Returning to the university years later, he enrolled in Professor Mary Collins’s English class, which paired students with Connecticut veterans for a collaborative writing project. Ron’s interview with Jerry P. Winn, a fellow Marine Corps veteran, was recently requested for publication in a Vietnam anthology.

The 4th Annual Flag Day Open House will be held on June 10, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. at the National Iwo Jima Memorial and Park, which can be found on Ella Grass Boulevard near Central Connecticut State University. There will be day-long military displays and demonstrations. Visitors may view an Iwo Jima WWII encampment, watch military era films, meet and speak with survivors of the WWII Battle of Iwo Jima, and take a tour of the monument and park. A detailed schedule and directions to the park will be posted on www.SOSIwoJima.com. All activities are free. If you have any questions, call Gary at 860-291-9666.
WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS
MARCH 31, 2012

Photographs courtesy of Jeanne Christie, Rob Hecker, Kevin Suares, and David Summerville.
Albert J. Holmes, 85, of Tariffville, CT, died on November 1, 2011. He was headed for overseas service when the Pacific war ended. Holmes served with distinction and earned the rank of Staff Sergeant. During his two years of military service, he manned a weather station on Okinawa and completed a brief tour in South Korea as a military policeman. Following the war, he utilized the GI Bill and completed both a Bachelor and Master of Arts degree from Trinity College.

Katherine Leahy, 99, of Stafford Springs, CT, passed away on March 14, 2012. After graduating from the Yale School of Nursing, Leahy worked in public health prior to the American entry in World War II. Foreseeing a long and bloody Pacific campaign, Leahy volunteered for the United States Navy Nurse Corps. Her initial assignment was as an instructor for Navy corpsmen at the St. Albans Naval Hospital in Queens, New York. In 1944, Leahy deployed to Guam, where she treated wounded personnel from the ongoing “island hopping” campaigns. Her service lasted through war’s end, when she cared for recently freed Allied prisoners of war. Following the war, Leahy joined the Catholic War Veterans, the Women’s Auxiliary, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

A GENEROUS DONATION TO CCSU’S Veterans History Project WILL HONOR THE MEMORIES OF A CONNECTICUT SERVICE MEMBER

The services of the VHP to Connecticut’s community of veterans would be greatly enhanced through your generosity in giving. We have an extensive waiting list for veteran interviews, many elderly and/or ill, but all badly wanting to share their experiences. BUT - our VHP lacks the financial resources that would allow us hear and record each unique personal history of these veterans, and archive their memories, as quickly as the VHP’s mission calls for. However, with your financial help, we can preserve a far greater share of the personal histories of our Connecticut veterans, and much more quickly, than we possibly could otherwise. HONOR the service of Connecticut's veterans and make a difference TODAY. HELP preserve the personal histories of our veterans and send a donation, in whatever amount you can afford, made payable to “CCSU” and mailed to:

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Central Connecticut State University
1615 Stanley Street, New Britain, CT, 06050

For more information or to participate please contact:
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