

# SOUND BITES from TOHA Board of Directors

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## *TOHA and the Veterans History Project*

In fall 2000, the U.S. Congress voted unanimously for legislation creating the Veterans History Project. Designed to capture the wartime memories of the nation's veterans, the project also aimed at engaging the American public in its own history. The project promotes the gathering of manuscript documents—letters, diaries, maps, photographs, home moves—and also recognizes the vital contribution of audio and video taped interviews to our understanding of wartime experience. Under the sponsorship of the American Folklife Center and the Library of Congress, the project has inspired people throughout the nation to talk with surviving veterans of twentieth-century wars and record their stories.

TOHA members are doing their part to preserve the memories of veterans, and this issue of our newsletter highlights the work of one, **Jason P. Theriot**, whose interviews have resulted in the publication of a three-book series, *To Honor Our Veterans: An Oral History of World War II Veterans from the Bayou Country*. Jason earned his degree in broadcast journalism at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and now lives in Houston, where he pursues research in military history. To explore veterans history, Jason returned to his roots in southern Louisiana, where he teamed up with his grandfather, Hewitt Theriot, to interview hundreds of men and women in the Acadiana community who served their country in wartime.

In this issue of *Sound Bites*, Jason shares with fellow oral historians some of his own significant memories of working with veterans and offers us all some important tips to remember in any oral history interview situation.

To ask Jason more about his work or to order his publications, contact him at 931 West 41st Street, Houston TX 77018; 713/812-7839; or [jpriort@hotmail.com](mailto:jpriort@hotmail.com).

Learn more about the Library of Congress  
Veterans History Project at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets>

## *TOHA Announces 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award*



Jo Ann Stiles

In March, the TOHA Board of Directors unanimously approved the Lifetime Achievement Award committee's recommendation for the 2004 recipient of the Thomas L. Charlton Lifetime Achievement Award: Jo Ann Stiles. The first woman so honored by TOHA, Jo Ann is also the first person from Southeast Texas to be recognized by TOHA for work in the field of oral history.

Jo Ann has devoted more than thirty-six years of her professional career at Lamar University to instructing students and others about Texas history and the virtues of oral history.

She is a master teacher, as attested by her numerous awards (including being named a Piper Professor in 1981), who has combined the traditional methods of lecture with "hands on doing of history" for her American history survey students and those students in her advanced level classes at Lamar. She requires oral history projects as part of the course assignments for her students. Over three hundred of these interviews are now housed in the special collections department of the Mary and John Gray Library at Lamar University—a valuable resource now

available to researchers and family historians in Beaumont.

The kind of person to lead by example, Jo Ann has conducted numerous interviews for her own research on the East Texas oil industry. Among the notable products of her research and oral history interviews are the award-winning 40 minute video, "The Extraordinary Ordinary People of Spindletop: The Supporting Cast," and the book she coauthored titled *Giant Under the Hill*, published by the Texas State Historical Association in 2002 and now in its second printing. In addition, she has conducted oral history interviews for a grant-funded project that focused on the sixtieth anniversary of Lamar University.

Furthermore, Jo Ann has zealously promoted the value of oral history as a teaching technique throughout the state in numerous symposia, workshops, and lectures for museums and preservation groups, Texas State Historical Association, East Texas Historical Association, public schools, local historical societies, and Elderhostel groups.

Not surprisingly, Jo Ann has taken an active role in the Texas Oral History Association, serving as vice president from 2000-2001 and president 2001-2002 and board member from 1999-present. Among other things, she coordinated the TOHA program at the TSHA meeting in 2002. She is also active in other historical associations, such as the Texas State Historical Association, East Texas Historical Association, Texas Gulf Historical Society, and Beaumont Heritage Society, among others.

For Jo Ann's vigorous promotion of oral history both in and outside the classroom and for her tireless efforts at collecting and preserving the oral memoirs of Texans, TOHA is proud to name her the fifth recipient of the Thomas L. Charlton Lifetime Achievement Award.

~ Gerald Saxon and Jim Conrad



## *Keeping in Touch: Member News*

**Paula S. Yost**, personal historian and founder of Heirloom Memories in Yantis, Texas, recently completed a project for Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler. The project created interviews with more than 150 veterans of wars from World War II through Desert Storm, focusing on their war experiences and how their faith played a part in getting them through. Yost edited the interviews into narratives, which are available online at <http://www.gabc.org/veterans.htm>. Yost's comments on the project are also posted online under the title "For God and Country" at <http://www.gabc.org/veterans/pdfs/projectrecap.pdf>.

On Friday, September 10, 2004, in Austin, TOHA sponsored two oral history workshops as part of the annual meeting of the Federated Genealogical Societies, held in conjunction with the Texas State Genealogical Society and the Austin Genealogical Society. TOHA president **Gerald Saxon** and secretary-treasurer **Lois Myers** taught about forty interested genealogists, librarians, and archivists in back-to-back workshops titled Heirlooms on Tape 1: Gathering Family Oral History and Heirlooms on Tape 2: Preserving and Sharing Family Oral History. The workshops earned TOHA \$300 in honoraria. In order to teach the workshops for TOHA, **Gerald** took time out from his new, very busy job as Dean of Libraries at The University of Texas at Arlington.

**David Todd** and the **Conservation History Association of Texas** continue to work on compiling an oral history of the state's conservation work. So far the collection includes interviews with more than 160 narrators which consume more than 340 hours of videotape, 10,000 pages of transcribed interviews, and more than 9,500 database records. Visit the project's home page at <http://www.texaslegacy.org>. Todd invites the comments and suggestions of TOHA members at 512/416-0400 or by e-mail at [dtodd@wt.org](mailto:dtodd@wt.org).

**Scott White**, former project manager for the **National Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Museum's** oral history program, has been named operations manager of the National Ranching Heritage Center, a 30-acre museum and historical park in Lubbock dedicated to the preservation of ranching and pioneer life in North America. To learn more about the center, visit <http://www.ttu.edu/RanchingHeritageCenter>.

Historian and certified archivist **Jo Ann Pospisil** recently reviewed and contributed photographs for "The Industry Today" segment of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory's newest addition on their website at <http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net>. The Wax Camps section explores the economic and cultural manifestations and current conditions in the little-known candelilla wax industry, an economic mainstay unique to the Big Bend region of Texas and Mexico.

TOHA awarded the excellent work of several student oral historians during the 2004 **Texas History Day**, held May 7-8 in Austin. This year the state history day required special awards presenters, such as TOHA, to choose one entry category for judging; therefore, the TOHA judges limited their work to entries in the documentary category. Documentaries present historical research in media varying from slide-tape to video to computer programs. TOHA awarded its senior division prize to Justin Thompson, from North Garland High School, whose project was titled "Sharing the Stars: Exploration, Encounter, Exchange, and the Race for Space." The junior division award honored a project titled "Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Countdown to the Atomic Age," presented by Nikolas Torres, Randy Wilson, Ernie Urueta, Ernie Martinez, and Samuel Gaglio, from Terrace Hills Middle School in El Paso.

### *Analog or Digital?*

New recording technologies are flooding the market. Which one is the best choice for oral historians?  
Andy Kolovos of the Vermont Folklife Center has researched the possibilities and pitfalls of the new technologies and shares his findings in the "Audio Field Recording Equipment Guide," available online at [http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res\\_audioequip.htm](http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res_audioequip.htm).

## One Last Trip for the Great Heroes of D-Day

By Jason P. Theriot

It has been nearly 60 years since the end of World War II. Now in their eighties, the veterans—soldiers, sailors, airmen and nurses—heroes of a war long since passed, are fighting another battle: the fight against Father Time. Shockingly, 1,500 of them die every day. It is critical for oral historians to grasp this moment, to seek out the last of these warriors, and to use our skills in preserving World War II history for the veterans' families and for generations to come. It is our duty.

No other event in the Second World War (and in the twentieth century, for that matter) was more pivotal than the historic Allied invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944—D-Day. In planning for this enormous undertaking, the U.S. Army indoctrinated a group of combat historians for the purpose of obtaining first-hand information and eyewitness accounts. It would be history in the making, and the Allied planners wanted it all well documented. One of those selected for the job of a combat historian was Forrest Pogue.

Pogue, a 31-year-old sergeant from Kentucky, landed in England in May 1944. He was prepared as well as any other soldier but, like all GIs, could not possibly fathom what lay ahead on the shores of Omaha Beach. Ultimately, the events of June 6, 1944 secured a toehold for the Allies on the European Continent and forever changed the course of history. Forrest Pogue, armed with a .45 pistol and the tools of a combat historian, had a front seat to the greatest show on earth.

In his diaries, *Pogue's War*, published in 2001, Pogue provided a first-hand account of the invasion, as witnessed from his position on a landing craft just offshore on D+1: "*We have an excellent vantage point of the bombardment . . . Heavy fire and, perhaps, depth charges seem to be cooking up several types of marine life. At last we could see the building that had loomed large on our map—the one commanding the approach to Easy Red exit. It seemed to be only a shell.*"\*

As wounded soldiers began boarding Pogue's ship, the historian quickly went into action interviewing the first veterans of D-Day. Once ashore, Sergeant Pogue continued to interview the soldiers from D-Day and from the breakout of Normandy. He tracked them down in France and Belgium and recorded their stories until the war ended in May of 1945. Later on in life, Pogue became one of the forerunners of mod-

ern day oral history and was president of the Oral History Association.

Stephen Ambrose, one of the great World War II historians, said, "Pogue has preserved for us an undeniably accurate account of D-Day. He was in a unique position and wrote in his own way. I know of no other account of the war that even approaches it."\*

Following in Forrest Pogue's footsteps, the work of preserving D-Day history fell to Ambrose and Captain Ron Drez, among others. Through thousands of oral history interviews and years of research, these two historians uncovered the events of D-Day and ignited a global thirst for preserving the treasured accounts of that great crusade and of other battles that led to an Allied victory in the Second World War. It was Ambrose's books (*D-Day* and *Citizen Soldiers*) which sparked a flame in my soul, as well, three years ago, and inspired me to kick-start my own veterans' oral history project. (See page 5.)

Recently, I traveled to France with the Stephen Ambrose Historical Tours for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion of Normandy. Like many others, my trip to the historic 60-mile stretch of beach was purpose-filled. I planned to visit the grave of a fallen Cajun soldier—the only Cajun soldier, incidentally, who was killed during the invasion—PFC. Houston D. Duhon. As the warm June sun beat across my brow, I placed a memorial wreath upon the foot of the cross which guards the final resting place of an 18-year-old soldier from my hometown. Present for this brief ceremony, among others, was Capt. Drez.

Later that evening, at our hotel in Caen, Capt. Drez invited me to join him in the lounge where he talked in great detail about Pogue and Ambrose. We shared stories about some of the heroes whom we've interviewed and reflected on the recent passing of President Reagan. The captain spoke eloquently of the former president's famous "Boys of Pointe-du-Hoc" speech given twenty years ago to the day. Since then, thousands of D-Day veterans have made the trek back to the sandy shores of Normandy. This day, June 6, 2004, may have been the last trip for most. I'm honored beyond words to have been a part of it all. What a day!

\*Quotations from Forrest C. Pogue, *Pogue's War: Diaries of a World War II Combat Historian*, foreword by Stephen Ambrose (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

## *Interviewing World War II Veterans: Follow the Boy Scout Motto*

By Jason P. Theriot

Mr. Forbus Mestayer, the mayor of the little town of Loreauville, Louisiana, was the first veteran I contacted for an interview when I began this project three years ago. I called the mayor and asked if my grandfather and I could interview him on Saturday afternoon. He responded, like most veterans from that humble generation would, "What do you want to talk to me for? I didn't see any action during the war." Nevertheless, he agreed to have us over for coffee, but suggested his brother Carol, a veteran of D-Day, join us. He told us that Carol had landed on Omaha Beach and had a fabulous story to tell.

My grandfather and I drove 25 miles to this little town to interview these two World War II veterans. When we arrived at the mayor's home, we were surprised to find the room filled with people. The sociable mayor had invited many of his friends and neighbors to join in. Sure enough, the mayor told his war story, which lasted just under 20 minutes. That was 20 minutes of a 90-minute cassette tape; the only tape that I had brought with me. I had planned for the afternoon trip to the small town to last about two hours. In fact, we didn't leave the mayor's home until 9:30 that evening. Luckily, his wife had blank cassette tapes to loan me. It appeared that this was not their first run-in with a journalist interested in war stories. However, it was indeed *my* first WWII interview. The motto here is *BE PREPARED! Always bring extra tapes.*

Two months later, a similar incident occurred. My grandfather convinced a former business associate (from 45 years earlier) to conduct an interview with us. His name was Rev. Cyrus V. Jackson, and he lived on C.V. Jackson Road in New Iberia. The 87-year-old man welcomed us into his home, but would only grant us about a 30-minute stay. In that 30 minutes, this old veteran told a remarkable story about his struggles as a black officer in the U.S. Army during World

War II and the roadblocks and hardships that drove him to achieve that promotion. As we thanked the kind old man for his time and bid him farewell, I could only think of others who would be touched by this fascinating oral history. When I returned home that evening and played back the tape, I was completely dumbfounded and horrified as I listened to the last 20 minutes of the recorded interview slowly drown into an unrecognizable blur. The batteries in my tape recorder had died right in the middle of the interview. Shortly after the ill-fated interview, the old man was rushed to a hospital where he would remain in ICU for several weeks before passing away in his sleep, taking his war story with him. *BE PREPARED! Always, always bring extra batteries.*

Try your best to *arrive on time* for an interview and bring a map if you are unsure of the area in which you are traveling. We had an 86-year-old attorney (still in the business) get very angry with us because we were four minutes late. "I'm out here wasting my time," he shouted, as we walked up to his front porch. The interview did not go very smoothly to say the least.

*Prepare questions before you arrive* at the interview. Prior to the visit, encourage the veterans to pull out old photos and memorabilia to help them recover buried memories of a war long since past. It will help the interview flow from the start.

Finally, if you are interviewing World War II veterans, or any war veterans for that matter, *be prepared to hear shocking stories* of the horrors of war. And be prepared to sit through these emotional moments as these men unlock their memories to the past and pour out their tears to you. In most cases, these veterans are telling their stories for the first time. And they have chosen you to be their witness before they die. *Be prepared and be humbled!*

*It's Your Turn* to share your experiences and suggestions with fellow oral historians. Send your stories to Lois Myers, TOHA, One Baylor Place #97271, Waco TX 76798-7271, or e-mail as an attachment to [lois\\_myers@baylor.edu](mailto:lois_myers@baylor.edu).

## *Congratulations to*

**Bruce Ashcroft** upon completion of his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. His dissertation title is “Why We Wanted Wings: American Aviation and Representations of the Air Force in the Years before World War II.”

**Jo Ann Stiles**, whose book *Giant Under the Hill: A History of the Spindletop Oil Discovery at Beaumont, Texas, in 1901*, coauthored with Judith Linsley and Ellen Rienstra, now in paperback, won the 2003 Otis Lock Award for superior publication in East Texas history from the East Texas Historical Association and received Honorable Mention in the 2003 Coral Horton Tullis Memorial Prize contest for the best book in Texas history from Texas State Historical Association. Jo Ann continues to work of the history of Beaumont and Spindletop. This year she has been conducting oral histories on the Orange, Texas, area and its prominent families—the Starks, Lutchers, and Browns—for a publication in the East Texas Historical Association’s F. Lee Lawrence Series.

The **Austin History Center** of the Austin Public Library, whose documentary film “The Blue Bellies Are in Austin: Readings from the Travis County Slave Narratives” won the Texas Library

Association’s 2004 Project of the Year Award, a prestigious recognition for the project that best exemplifies highest achievement among libraries and improved library services for communities. TOHA members **Susan K. Soy** and **Karen Riles** of the Austin History Center explain that the film features readings of 1930s interviews conducted with former slaves living in Austin and Travis County.

**Susie Kelly Flatau**, who was one of seven Austin-area writers/journalists invited by the International Hospitality Committee of Austin to consult with representative educational administrators from the Republic of Kazakhstan on methods and visions for writing and recording the life stories and contemporary history of their nation.

**Rebecca Sharpless**, director of the Baylor University Institute for Oral History and former TOHA secretary treasurer, who in 2003 was elected First Vice President of the Oral History Association. For 2004-2005, Rebecca is Vice President/President Elect, with responsibility for organizing the program for the 2005 OHA annual meeting, and during 2005-2006 she will serve as OHA President.

### *Oral History Tips: Analyzing Oral History Interviews*

Like any other primary document, an oral history interview must be explored for validity and accuracy.

#### **Questions to ask about the content of an oral history interview:**

1. What are the most important points made in this interview?
2. What patterns, key phrases, themes emerge from the stories told?
3. How does the interviewee express his/her feelings—not only what is said, but how it is said?
4. What do these stories teach me about my topic?
5. Do the interviewee’s stories corroborate or dispute other information? Why?
6. What other questions might this interviewee be able to answer on historical topics?
7. Based on what this interview uncovers, what additional research do I need to do to learn more about the topic or to verify these stories?

## TOHA Book Notes

**Michael Widener**, head of Special Collections for the Tarlton Law Library, School of Law, University of Texas at Austin, has announced the publication of *Corwin W. Johnson: An Oral History Interview*, No. 4 in the Tarlton Law Library Legal History Series. The memoir includes an interview conducted by Sheree Scarborough and a foreword by Johnson's former student, James A. Baker III, the former U.S. Secretary of State and Secretary of the Treasury. Johnson, who began teaching at the UT School of Law in 1947, is co-author of the leading textbook on property law. In the interview, topics discussed include the legalities surrounding integration of universities during the last century, highlights in the history and leadership of the UT School of Law, and the social life and traditions of law students. For more information, contact the Publications Coordinator, Jamail Center for Legal Research, UT School of Law, 727 East Dean Keeton Street, Austin TX 78705-3224, or visit <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/pubs>.

The population of Texas grows daily, but consider the fact that between 1860 and 1920, the state's population increased by 672 percent. Accounting for much of that growth was the promotional literature of entrepreneurial Texans, a process documented by **Barbara J. Rozek** in *Come to Texas: Enticing Immigrants*, newly published by Texas A&M University Press. A longtime TOHA member, Rozek teaches ad-

vanced placement U.S. History at Taylor High School in Houston. Order *Come to Texas* online at <http://www.tamu.edu/press>, or look in your local book store.

Years of research have culminated for **Chester R. Burns** with publication of *Saving Lives, Training Caregivers, Making Discoveries: A Centennial History of the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston* (Texas State Historical Association, 2003). Burns, who is the James Wade Rockwell Professor of Medical History at UTMB, and his colleagues conducted eighty-five oral history interviews to round out archival research investigating the human interactions that propelled the growth and development of Texas's first university medical school, founded in 1881. In addition to the book, the interview transcripts are available online at <http://ar.utmb.edu/centennial>.

**Susie Kelly Flatau** is collaborating with author/editor Lou Rodenberger on a book titled *Quotable Texas Women* and, at the same time, is researching background for another book, *Historic Texas Depots*, that will feature a collection the train depots from across the state. Look for these titles from State House Press in 2005. Susie also continues to facilitate life story writing workshops on an independent basis and through the Writers' League of Texas.

### Oral History Tips: Evaluating Oral History Interviews

#### Questions to ask to evaluate the quality of the tape recording and interviewing skills:

1. Is the technical quality of this tape good? Audio clear? Volume strong? Is there background noise? Internal machine noise?
2. Did I ask open-ended questions? Good follow up questions?
3. What did I learn from this experience about doing interviews?
4. What should I do differently next time?

## Mark your calendar

**ANYTIME, but especially NOW**

Submit an article to the editorial board of *Sound Historian*. For instructions, see inside cover of the journal or visit the TOHA homepage at <http://www3.baylor.edu/TOHA/>

**January 2005**

TOHA membership renewal time

**March 3-5, 2005**

TOHA annual program meeting in joint session with Texas State Historical Association, Fort Worth

**May 2005**

TOHA officer election (volunteers and nominations welcomed!)

**November 2-6, 2005**

Oral History Association annual meeting, Providence RI

**Fall 2006**

Oral History Association annual meeting Little Rock AR



## Do You Manage an Oral History Collection?

If so, you may find this news helpful. Nancy MacKay, Mills College librarian/cataloguer and a practicing oral historian, has posted the outcome of a survey conducted earlier this year among managers or “curators” of oral history collections.

The survey addresses such questions as: How can the interviewer best communicate correct information for the catalog record? How can the cataloger emphasize (or even explain!) the importance of authority control and correct spelling to the interviewer? What are the guidelines for index terms? Use MARC or use metadata? Catalog as book or sound recording? Collection level or item level record? Should I purchase analog or digital recorders? Do I understand digital equipment sufficiently to teach others, and to troubleshoot? Should I allocate resources to make preservation copies in multiple formats? What about reeducating transcribers to use digital transcribing software? How important and how time consuming is format refreshment? What are the pros and cons of putting oral histories online?

View the survey report in html at <http://people.mills.edu/mackay/FinalSurvey%20results.htm>, or in .pdf at <http://people.mills.edu/mackay/FinalPDF.pdf>.